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George Eliot's moral vision: The feminine ideal

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The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1987

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GEORGE ELIOT'S MORAL VISION:

THE FEMININE IDEAL

by

Winston Fitzpatrick

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Ph.D. in English

Greensboro
1987

Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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Unlike many Victorian writers, George Eliot is not concerned with examining and defining the ideal gentleman. Instead, in her novels, most notably in Scenes of Clerical Life, Silas Marner, Romola, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda, she presents the reader with what I call her feminine ideal, and she evaluates both male and female characters according to it. Those characters whom Eliot most admires possess qualities that most Victorians considered to be feminine. They are self-sacrificing and also exert a beneficial influence on others, such as that described by such women's conduct guides as Louis Aimé-Martin's Woman's Mission. But Eliot's feminine ideal differs from the Victorian's passive angel-in-the-house. Though self-sacrificing, the characters who conform to Eliot's ideal, such as Daniel Deronda and Dorothea Brooke in Middlemarch, are active on behalf of others.

Their activity also distinguishes these characters from the gentleman, as Eliot portrays him in her novels. The ideal gentleman, who provided a moral standard by which many Victorians evaluated themselves and others, is portrayed by Eliot as being essentially passive. Though Eliot admires the objectivity and rationality which are the most admirable qualities of gentlemen such as Farebrother in Middlemarch, she believes that the sort of "ardent generos-

ity" which is characteristic of Dorothea Brooke has a greater power to bring about change not only in the individual but in society as a whole.

Though Eliot's moral vision remains the same throughout all her novels, her attitude about how effective it can be in bringing about the kind of change her feminine ideal requires does alter. She is, far more optimistic about the possibility that one individual can have a beneficial influence on another, as Scenes of Clerical Life and Silas Marner reveal, than she is about the possibility that an individual can achieve sweeping social change. While Savonarola's story in Romola demonstrates her doubts on this score, Dorothea's personal history in Middlemarch suggests that an individual can have a limited influence on society. Finally, in Daniel Deronda, Eliot again examines, with limited success, whether an individual can have a profound influence on society.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Traditionally, critics of George Eliot's fiction have remarked that her novels differ from those of other Victorian writers in that they do not include an "ideal gentleman." The cult of the gentleman, at its peak in England during the Victorian period, is reflected, for example, in the work of Dickens, Thackeray, and Trollope. But an examination of her novels reveals that Eliot does not subscribe to this cult. That is not to say that there are no characters in Eliot's novels who conform to a gentlemanly ideal. Sir James Chettam in Middlemarch and Sir Hugo Mallinger in Daniel Deronda are two notable examples of the gentleman in Eliot's work. However, these ideal gentlemen are not among the characters whom Eliot intends for her readers to admire most.

The characters whom Eliot most admires are those like Middlemarch's Dorothea Brooke and the title character of Daniel Deronda. These characters possess qualities that most Victorians considered to be feminine. They have a great capacity for self-sacrifice, motivated by a genuine love for others, and they are able to exert varying degrees of moral influence on others. Eliot is, in effect, arguing

that the gentlemanly ideal does not provide moral and social values which are adequate to the task of coping with the world in which everyone must live. She proposes instead what I will call a "feminine ideal" to replace it, and she argues that both men and women should be guided by it. By offering an alternative to the gentlemanly ideal in Scenes of Clerical Life, Silas Marner, Romola, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda, Eliot is making the same argument that she makes in a letter to a friend in 1874:

> the progress of the world--which you say can only come at the right time--can certainly never come at all save by the modified action of the individual beings who compose the world.[1]

In her novels, Eliot focuses on the individual as the agent of change.

Furthermore, Eliot herself wishes to influence her readers to replace the gentlemanly ideal with her feminine ideal. She hopes to achieve this influence, as Harold Bloom says, by abolishing "the demarcations between aesthetic pleasure and moral renunciation" and presenting the reader "with morality as an end in itself."[2] That is, in her work, Eliot intends for her readers to take aesthetic pleasure in the characters who exemplify her feminine ideal of self-sacrifice and influence for good. But Eliot does not always succeed in accomplishing this purpose, as a

comparison of the title character of Romola and Middlemarch's Dorothea, both of whom are representatives of Eliot's feminine ideal, reveals. As a character, Romola is a failure aesthetically since Eliot characterizes her as being impossibly ideal; she is essentially a cold exemplar of the qualities that make up Eliot's ideal. On the other hand, Eliot's characterization of Dorothea is aesthetically successful. Though Eliot portrays her as being as self-sacrificing as Romola, Dorothea's imperfections, her personal weaknesses and failures, are explored; the reader is even invited to laugh at them. In short, Dorothea is a believable character, while Romola is not. Eliot's failure, then, always to find a successful embodiment of her feminine ideal is an aesthetic failure.

Since Eliot's feminine ideal developed, at least in part, as a reaction to the idea of the gentleman, a brief examination of the gentleman as he was defined by the Victorians is necessary here. Eliot was reacting to a specific tradition which had been a fixture in English life and literature for centuries. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the original meaning of the word gentleman was "a man of gentle birth." However, the Victorian definition of the gentleman as someone who possesses a moral excellence that sets him apart from others is apparent as early as the fourteenth century, as

this passage from The Wife of Bath's Tale demonstrates:

> But for ye speken of swich gentillesse,
> As is descended out of old richesse,
> That therfore sholden ye be gentilmen,
> Swich arrogance is not worth an hen.
> Loke who that is most vertuous alway,
> Privee and apert, and most entendeth ay
> To do the gentil dedes that he can,
> And tak him for the grettest gentil man.[3]

The idea that the most important qualities of the true gentleman are moral qualities and that these qualities are revealed by his actions was already current in Chaucer's time, and Chaucer's knight demonstrates these qualities himself.

However, the complexity of the term "gentleman" is revealed by the fact that in the centuries following the appearance of Chaucer's knight, it acquired almost as many meanings as there were people who used the word. It could mean a member of the gentry, a man with a private income, a man with good manners, an exploiter of the lower classes, or a parasite on society. Even a single individual might accept two definitions simultaneously, as is revealed by a look at Daniel Defoe's literary definition of the eighteenth-century gentleman in The Compleat English Gentleman. Even while arguing that men of gentle birth should return to those virtues which are uniquely theirs, Defoe also remarks that a man of low birth may prove

himself a gentleman by possessing "an originall fund of wealth, wit, sense, courage, and good humour."[4] Similarly, in Emma, published in 1816, Jane Austen reveals her understanding of the complexity of the term by creating two very different gentlemen: Mr. Knightley and Mr. Woodhouse. While Mr. Knightley's name as well as his actions suggest that he fits into the tradition that includes Chaucer's knight, Mr. Woodhouse reveals his selfishness by his fears for his own health and his almost complete lack of activity.

But both Mr. Knightley and Mr. Woodhouse can be said to be the literary descendant of Sir Roger de Coverley, a gentleman whom Robin Gilmour calls "one of the great English archetypes."[5] As Gilmour points out, Addison and Steele developed the character of Sir Roger in their essays for the Tatler and Spectator in part as a reaction to what remained of Restoration manners, as portrayed in plays like Etheridge's "The Man of Mode."[6] In sharp contrast to the Restoration rake, Sir Roger is a decent old English gentleman, who is a good and generous landlord and a friend to the poor in his capacity as squire at the county court sessions. Austen is to give these same qualities to Mr. Knightley almost a century later. But there are things about Mr. Woodhouse that make him resemble Sir Roger as well, things which suggest that the gentleman is not always so active. Though he means well, Mr. Woodhouse is com-

pletely self-absorbed and so he has little real effect on those around him. Though more active than Mr. Woodhouse, Sir Roger does not act to change things either; he is, in fact, basically conservative and resistant to change.

The remarks of a Frenchwoman on the subject of the English gentleman indicate that the gentleman was easily recognized as a national type, even by those who were not English. M. de Stael (Holstein) has this to say in her Letters on England in 1830:

> The first condition for obtaining respect in England in any class, is to be what is called a gentleman; an expression that has no corresponding term in French, and a perfect knowledge of which implies in itself a pretty long familiarity with English manners.[7]

M. de Stael indicates that in England the term gentleman has taken on a unique meaning, a meaning she further defines when she says,

> A gentleman is someone who, with some advantage of birth, fortune, talent, or situation, unites moral qualities suitable to the place he occupies in society, and manners indicating a liberal education.[8]

The term may, according to M. de Stael, be applied to a man of any class and may be earned by merit as well as conferred by birth. It includes conduct as well as manners and talent as well as or in place of birth. It is a

standard by which all literate men may be judged.

By the nineteenth century, the notion of the gentleman had become, as Robin Gilmour points out, "a cultural goal, a mirror of desirable moral and social values,"[9] but at the same time the title of gentleman was used to indicate social status. This fact is reflected in the enormous amount of energy that was spent in discussing and fostering the notion of the gentleman during the Victorian period. There were some who believed that the word gentleman was indicative only of social status. In Modern Painters, John Ruskin refers to a gentleman first as "a man of pure race," who is well-bred just as a horse or a dog is well-bred. But Ruskin, like Defoe, goes on to say that a lower class person may have noble blood

> since his family may have been ennobling it by pureness of moral habit for many generations and yet may not have got any title or other sign of nobleness attached to their name.[10]

Most of the many sermons, articles, and books written about the gentleman argued with Ruskin that the term suggested something more than social position.

The gentlemanly ideal included more than simple manners as well, as books like Kenelm Digby's The Broadstone of Honour: or, Rules for the Gentlemen of England and A. P. Stanley's Life of Dr. Arnold make clear.

Both Digby and Arnold argued that a man could not be a gentleman who was not a Christian. Digby used the example of medieval chivalry to encourage the gentleman to assume responsibilities he believed to be inherent to his role, while Arnold maintained that an English gentleman must be "Christian, manly, and enlightened." Arnold contributed to the institutionalization of the gentlemanly virtues by his work at Rugby and his influence upon other English public schools. As J. R. de S. Honey points out, Arnold based his reform of the public school on his plans for reform of the church.[11] He believed that the social and moral problems of English society could be solved by creating a Christianized state. And men like Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, on whom Arnold had a great influence, believed that these problems could best be met by a kind of muscular Christianity, a term which was the rallying cry for the Christian Socialists.[12] These men believed that the gentlemanly code was based upon Christian principles and that it required gentlemen to act to change things both politically and socially. Social reformers like Gladstone, who pushed for various social reforms, was just this sort of active, energetic gentleman.

But the ideal of the gentleman was not associated exclusively with Christianity, nor was it exclusively, or even primarily, an active ideal, and Eliot's novels reflect

these facts. The gentlemen who appear in Eliot's novels are more likely to resemble Sir Roger de Coverley or Mr. Woodhouse than Chaucer's knight. Though well-meaning, for the most part, they are unlikely to take any sort of decisive action or advocate any kind of reform. Eliot's gentlemen are more than likely rather like those she met with as a child when she drove around the Warwickshire countryside with her father and stopped with him at the homes of those for whom he acted as bailiff.[13]

The type of gentleman about whom Eliot writes is perhaps best described by Cardinal Newman in The Idea of a University. In his definition of the gentleman, Cardinal Newman makes a distinction between Christianity, specifically Catholicism, and gentlemanliness. Newman refers to the religion of the period as a religion of reason, saying that it is a "Religion of civilized times, of the cultivated intellect, of the philosopher, scholar, and gentleman."[14] This religion, this cult of the gentleman, according to Newman, makes an individual's desire to maintain his self-esteem the primary motivating factor in determining his behavior. This excerpt from Discourse VIII, which defines the gentleman as one who does not inflict pain, makes clear that his behavior is determined by pride:

> His benefits may be considered as parallel to what are called comforts or conveniences in arrange-

> ments of a personal nature: like an easy chair or a good fire, which do their part in dispelling cold and fatigue, though nature provides both means of rest and animal heat without them. The true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast;--all clashing of opinion, or collision of feeling, all restraint, or suspicion, or gloom, or resentment; his great concern being to make every one at their ease and at home. He has his eyes on all his company; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful towards the absurd; he can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome. He makes light of favours while he does them, and seems to be receiving when he is conferring . . . Nowhere shall we find greater candour, consideration, indulgence: he throws himself into the minds of his opponents, he accounts for their mistakes. He knows the weakness of human reason as well as its strength, its province and its limits.[15]

The interesting thing about this definition is that, as Gilmour says, "Newman's gentleman is not a man who does but a man who refrains from doing."[16] Newman's gentleman wants to make life more pleasant for others in the same way that an easy chair makes a person comfortable. But a chair's role is a passive one; it does nothing more than give slightly wherever it comes in contact with a person. Its essential shape never really changes at all. Newman's definition makes the gentleman someone who will exert himself for others only insofar as his exertions do not require him to sacrifice that image of himself that he has carefully constructed.

Though he is quite genuinely courteous, wise, tolerant, and strong, Newman's gentleman is also selfish. That is not to say that he is merely an opportunist on the order of Lord Chesterfield whose advice to his son suggests that he should seem to be gentlemanly merely to advance his own interests.[17] Nor does Newman suggest that the gentleman is merely an empty shell on the order of Beau Brummel, the Regency dandy to whom outward appearance was everything.

In fact, there are definite moral qualities that Newman's gentleman feels himself bound to exhibit, but he is bound to them primarily by his pride in the possession of them. Newman refers to the gentlemanly ideal as having made "virtue a point of good taste and vice vulgar and ungentlemanlike."[18] He argues, for example, that it is self-respect which prevents a gentleman from duelling, not a belief that duelling is morally wrong. However, Newman's analysis of the truth behind the character of the gentleman does not alter his belief that the ideal should be fostered through a university education.

Newman might be said to concur with Eliot in believing that the gentlemanly ideal is excellent as far as it goes, but that it does not demand enough of the individual. This is borne out again and again in Eliot's novels. The fact that the ideal of the gentleman fosters civilized behavior is suggested, for example, by an incident which occurs at

the end of Felix Holt. Eliot often makes a baronet the proponent of the gentlemanly ideal, as she does in this novel, a fact that reflects her own recognition that the word "gentleman" suggests social as well as moral qualities. Harold Transome is befriended by Sir Maximus Debarry at a public gathering just after he has learned for the first time who his real father is. After a quarrel during which Harold and the lawyer Jermyn come to blows, Jermyn reveals that he is Harold's father in the hearing of all the other men at the meeting. Sir Maximus, who has not been very friendly to Harold since his return from India, reacts in this way:

> The young strong man reeled with a sick faintness. But in the same moment Jermyn released his hold, and Harold felt himself supported by the arm. It was Sir Maximus Debarry who had taken hold of him.
>
> "Leave the room, sir!" the baronet said to Jermyn, in a voice of imperious scorn. "This is a meeting of gentlemen."
>
> "Come, Harold," he said, in the old friendly voice, "come away with me."[19]

The thing that excludes Jermyn from the company of gentleman is the revelation of Harold's true parentage before everyone, not the fact that he is Harold's father, which has been an open secret for years. Eliot indicates that she admires Sir Maximus' action by closing a chapter with this incident and allowing it to speak for itself.

But the fact that the chapter ends here also suggests that this is the extent of Sir Maximus' action. Like Newman's gentleman, he does not want to cause a jar or a jolt; he is comforting to Harold without being really helpful. Furthermore, he might have done something to help Harold at any time since his return. Sir Maximus does not compare favorably with Felix Holt, who, though his actions sometimes go awry, is much more active in his attempts to help others. In scenes like this one, Eliot suggests that the gentlemanly ideal limits the actions of those who are guided by it.

The fact that the ideal of the gentleman is a civilizing influence is reflected in the Victorian novel. Most Victorian novelists did not believe that the flaw that Newman finds in the character of the gentleman is really a flaw. The novelists may give a great deal of attention to defining the ideal gentleman, but, unlike Eliot, they accept the notion that it is a worthy ideal. Robin Gilmour has shown that both Dickens and Thackeray accept the essentially middle-class ideal, though each modifies it slightly to include qualities usually associated with other classes.[20] However, both of them regard the ideal of the gentleman as the moral standard by which the behavior of all men must be judged.

Dickens defines the type by incorporating qualities that he associates with the lower classes. In Great Expectations, Dickens' most thorough study of a man's striving for gentility, Pip wants to be a gentleman in order to escape the brutal world in which he is living. The attack by Magwitch is the most obvious example of brutality, but Pip must also endure the cruel treatment of his sister, who is bringing him up "by hand." Pip's coming into his great expectations moves him into the middle-class, but escaping from the brutality also means leaving behind Joe Gargery, his sister's husband, who represents the positive aspects of the world Pip has been living in. Joe is not only associated with the strength and energy of the forge; he is unfailingly kind, generous, and loyal to Pip, both when Pip is living at the forge and later when he is ill after Magwitch's death. Joe nurses Pip during his long illness in spite of the ingratitude that Pip has shown him after he had become a "gentleman."

As a result, Pip's notion of gentility undergoes a change, which becomes clear when he says of Joe: "And as my extreme weakness prevented me from getting up and going to him, I lay there, penitently whispering, 'O God bless him. O God bless this gentle Christian man.'"[21] By having Pip separate the two parts of the word gentleman Dickens suggests that social class is less important in defining

the gentleman than are the qualities that Joe possesses: strength, loyalty, generosity, and kindness. But only Pip has the opportunity to develop and exhibit these qualities. Neither Estella nor Miss Havisham is evaluated in terms of this gentlemanly ideal. The women in Dickens' novels are judged instead according to the prevailing feminine ideal, which I will discuss later.

In contrast to Dickens, Thackeray reacts against the way that the upper-class gentleman was defined during the Regency period. Instead of making his ideal gentleman like the Regency dandies of fashionable novelists like Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli, Thackeray's ideal gentleman in Vanity Fair is Dobbin, who can in no way be described as fashionable. In fact, George Osborne, who comes closer to fitting into the older ideal, laughs at Dobbin for his clumsiness, his lisp, and his unfashionable clothes. But Thackeray says of Dobbin that "his thoughts were just, his brains were fairly good, his life was honest and pure and his heart warm and humble."[22] These are the bourgeois virtues of the Victorian gentleman. The fact that these virtues are combined in Dobbin with the more old-fashioned virtues of courage and honor reveals Thackeray's devotion to certain elements of the aristocratic definition of the gentleman. As Gilmour says, "In Dobbin, the soldier and the middleclass man are reconciled."[23] Though Vanity Fair

is a novel without a hero, it makes a case for the heroic virtues. The women in Vanity Fair, however, do not share in these heroic virtues, nor are they generally evaluated according to the gentlemanly ideal.

On the other hand, Anthony Trollope's novels resemble Eliot's in that both the male and female characters are evaluated according to the same ideal. In fact, Shirley Letwin argues that the most perfect gentleman in Trollope's novels is a woman, Madame Max Goesler.[24] Furthermore, Trollope's gentleman is firmly situated in the middle-class tradition. Even Plantagenet Palliser, though a Duke, demonstrates the Victorian gentleman's desire to serve his country, and Trollope considered Palliser his most complete portrait of the gentleman. Trollope's novels, according to Letwin, offer as complete a picture of the Victorian gentleman as one can get. In her study of the gentleman in Trollope, Letwin constructs what amounts to a defense of the gentlemanly ideal and provides a useful definition of it.

Letwin agrees with Newman that the chief motivating factor in determining the gentleman's conduct is his regard for himself, a regard based upon a respect for his own integrity. This respect for himself demands an equivalent respect for the integrity of others, based upon the knowledge that they are human beings just like himself. It is

from this knowledge that the gentleman derives the principles by which he lives, which might be described simply as "treating others as you would have them treat you." Letwin maintains that the gentleman is governed not by a code but by the virtues that produce the integrity that he values.

These virtues, which may seem to be contradictory, are not necessarily the traditional qualities that Chaucer, Defoe, or Madame de Stael might have identified as belonging to the gentleman. It is interesting that not only Trollope's but also Eliot's gentlemen, not her most admirable characters, often conform to Letwin's definition. Letwin maintains that there are four virtues that the gentleman must possess: discrimination, diffidence, courage, and honesty.[25] A gentleman's discrimination includes the ability to make moral judgments, to see that there is more than one possible motive behind a person's action. For example, in Middlemarch, Sir James Chettam is able to perceive the truth about Casaubon's kindness to his relatives when he says, "But a man may wish to do what is right, and yet be a sort of parchment code."[26] Sir James is aware that Casaubon only wishes to seem to be kind; he does not feel kindly towards his poor relations.

Diffidence, the second of the virtues, can best be described as a gentleman's awareness of his own limita-

tions. When Sir Hugo Mallinger declines to tell Deronda about his true parentage in Daniel Deronda, he is demonstrating a gentleman's diffidence. But Letwin goes farther than this in her definition of diffidence; she says a gentleman's attitude to altruism best demonstrates his diffidence. The gentleman equates altruism with self-sacrifice, which his respect for himself prevents him from adopting. He also cannot have absolute confidence that his way of viewing things is the correct way; therefore, being altruistic is the same thing as being arrogant. Any sort of self-sacrifice, then, becomes wrong because of a gentleman's respect for himself.

The third virtue that Letwin identifies as belonging to a gentleman is courage. She defines courage as a willingness to listen to objections that are made to the conclusions which a gentleman has drawn with the aid of his discrimination and diffidence. Aware of his own limitations, yet also confident of his ability to discriminate between right and wrong, a gentleman needs courage in order to "take a firm stand while recognizing that the rightness of doing so is questionable."[27]

Honesty, a gentleman's fourth virtue, does not refer simply to the absence of deceit. In fact, Letwin maintains that the gentleman may lie because his discrimination tells him that the truth might deceive more than a falsehood

would in certain circumstances. The important thing is that he maintain his objectivity about himself and others. Everything he says and does must be consistent with his knowledge of himself and other people, of his carefully acquired knowledge of his own strengths and limitations, and of the strengths and limitations of others. The quality of honesty, as Letwin defines it, is closely related to Matthew Arnold's concept of disinterestedness. It prevents a gentleman from manipulating others for his own purposes and demands, as Arnold says, the "free play of the mind on all subjects that it touches."[28]

The distinguishing feature of the gentleman, then, according to Letwin's definition, is objectivity in all things. The gentleman's discrimination, his diffidence, and his courage, as well as his honesty, all tend to make him a thoroughly rational being . But for Eliot, this rationality, though admirable, is not enough. To Eliot, the major flaw in the gentlemanly ideal is that it precludes altruistic actions, actions that spring not from self-love but from love for others. If a person acts out of love for others, this means that his or her response is not purely objective; it is subjective as well. While objectivity facilitates judgment, it does not promote under- standing, which, according to Eliot, is necessary for selfless action.

Eliot's belief in selflessness arises in large part from the influence of Ludwig Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity, which Eliot translated and with which, as she says, "she everywhere agrees."[29] Feuerbach argues that love is the true essence of Christianity, but that man has denied it its substance by making it merely an attribute of God.[30] Christian theology has made man the object of God's love; it has objectified love in the person of God, as in the phrase "God is love." But the love that man attributes to God, according to Feuerbach, has its source in the love of human beings for one another, and this love properly expresses itself in altruistic behavior:

> For though there is also a self-interested love among men, still the true human love, which is alone worthy of this name, is that which impels the sacrifice of self to another.[31]

Eliot's "religion of humanity," which she shares with Feuerbach, rejects the gentlemanly diffidence that prevents a person from acting in response to his deepest feelings. As Bernard Paris has shown in his study of her relationship to Feuerbach's thought, Eliot believed that

> a completely objective view of the cosmic order, although it yields truth, provides no morality. Without objectivity there is no truth; but without subjectivity, there is no human value or meaning.[32]

The moral order must not be established, then, upon purely objective reasoning, based upon self love, such as that demanded by the gentlemanly ideal. It must be consciously directed by human love, expressing itself as self-sacrifice.

The fact that Eliot regarded the capacity for self-sacrifice as essentially a feminine quality is revealed by remarks in many of her letters. For example, in a letter to John Morley, she argues that "the intention of Nature argument" is a "pitiable fallacy." Yet she goes on to say that

> as a fact of mere zoological evolution, woman seems to me to have the worst share in existence. But for that very reason I would the more contend that in the moral evolution we have "an art which does mend nature." It is the function of love in the largest sense, to mitigate the harshness of all fatalities.[33]

Eliot suggests that women are more likely to possess a greater fund of the self-sacrificing love that Feuerbach regards as essential for moral evolution. She seems to suggest here that because of what she elsewhere calls the "physical and psychological differences between women and men," women have this special capacity for love that should be the foundation for the moral order.[34] In a letter to Emily Davies, she attempts to define what she calls "woman's peculiar constitution for a special moral influence," which she says is made up of

> that exquisite type of gentleness, tenderness, possible maternity suffusing a woman's being with affectionateness, which is what we mean by the feminine character.[35]

This capacity for a "special moral influence" is the basis for what I am calling Eliot's feminine ideal.

Eliot's preference for the "feminine" qualities led some critics of her work to believe with Richard Simpson in his review of Romola in 1863 that Eliot's women characters exhibit

> almost the monopoly of the emotional nature--of the passions, which are the elements of life; a bubbling and fermenting source of power, whose impulses seem like the acts of external force, instinctive, vague, involuntary, but rich and mighty, like a divine energy within us. Perhaps she does not think that women possess it more really than men, but that in the woman it is not overlaid with all the unreasonable products of manly reason; with overlogical feats and overhoneycombed brain.[36]

Simpson is talking about something more here than the axiom that makes the emotions feminine and the reason masculine. In fact, he puts his finger on the thing that distinguishes Eliot's feminine ideal from the more generally accepted Victorian ideal of the passive angel in the house, an ideal that Carol Christ ably describes in her essay on the subject.[37] The distinguishing feature of Eliot's ideal is that the emotions are a source of power and influence and, to Eliot, under the influence of Feuerbach, love is the

emotion that is the most powerful.

Middlemarch provides perhaps the best examples of the different types of behavior that are demanded by the gentlemanly ideal and by Eliot's feminine ideal. At the beginning of the book, Sir James Chettam appeals to the Rev. Cadwallader for help in preventing Dorothea from marrying Casaubon, which he correctly sees as being a mistake. When Cadwallader responds by saying that he does not know for certain that it is a mistake and so should do nothing, he is responding objectively, fulfilling the gentlemanly ideal. On the other hand, at the end of the novel, when Dorothea goes to see Rosamond and persaudes her to forget her doubts about Lydgate, she is acting in response to her deepest feelings, which tell her that Lydgate could not have done what he is accused of doing. Dorothea's selflessness in making this appeal to Rosamond, whom she believes to be involved with Will Ladislaw, is effective; that is, it brings about a change, however slight, in Rosamond.

The gentlemen, Sir James Chettam and even Rev. Farebrother, believe the worst about Lydgate and do nothing to help him, and so they do not have the same effect on others that Dorothea does. Their objectivity, which tells them that he might have acted wrongly under such great pressure, prevents them from acting, while Dorothea,

motivated by love, does act to change things. Eliot's feminine ideal, in contrast to the ideal of the gentleman is an active ideal, and the "bubbling and fermenting source of power" that Simpson refers to in his review is the power of Feuerbach's ideal of selfless love, when acted upon, to influence others.

But it is women who were thought of by many Victorians as purely passive beings, and it is the active nature of Eliot's ideal that makes it different from the more generally accepted feminine ideal as well. Though Eliot's ideal does owe something to the Victorian belief in feminine influence, I am not suggesting that Eliot wholeheartedly accepted that belief, only that she could not fail to be aware of it and even be influenced by it.

The doctrine of feminine influence, as understood by most Victorians, maintained that in spite of, or rather because of their passivity, their isolation from the active, aggressive male world, women were able, through intuition, to achieve a kind of knowledge unavailable to men. This passage from Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House" helps clarify this belief:

> Say that she wants the will of man
> To conquer fame, not checked by cross,
> Nor moved when others bless or ban;
> She wants what but to have were loss.
> Or say she wants the patient brain
> To track shy truth; her facile wit

> At that which he hunts down with pain
> Flies straight, and does exactly hit.[38]

According to Patmore, though women lack the patience or will power to pursue the things that occupy men, they pasively achieve what men actively strive for. Patmore's ideal woman is morally superior to men because she is cut off from the corrupting world outside the home.

But, at the same time, the angel in the house is expected to exert a beneficial influence, not only upon men but upon all of society. In her conduct guide for women, which purports to describe their social duties, Sarah Ellis Stickney declares that her purpose is "to show how intimate is the connection which exists between the women of England, and the moral character maintained by the country in the scale of nations."[39] In Sesame and Lilies, John Ruskin goes even further in attributing responsibility to women when he says,

> There is not a war in the world, no, nor an injustice, but you women are answerable for it; not in that you have provoked, but in that you have not hindered. Men, by their very nature, are prone to fight; they will fight for any cause, or for none. It is for you to choose their cause for them and to forbid them when there is no cause.[40]

Ruskin expresses the Victorians' belief in the doctrine of feminine influence, the belief that women, though passive, should somehow influence men in such a way that they

improve the moral character of society.

While Eliot was certainly aware of the beliefs about feminine influence that were current in England throughout the nineteenth century, a more direct influence, which reinforced her thinking on the subject, was the Frenchman Louis Aimé-Martin's The Education of Mothers: or the Civilization of Mankind by Women. As early as 1840, she mentions Women's Mission, the English adaptation of Aimé-Martin's book, in a letter to her former teacher, Maria Lewis, calling it "the most philosophical and masterly on the subject ever written."[41] Aimé-Martin's purpose is somewhat different from the purpose of other writers of conduct guides for women, since he urges that women should be educated in much the same way as men. He argues that women should be taught poetry, history, and philosophy, the things that he says "enlighten the conscience, and elevate the soul."[42]

This education is necessary, according to Aimé-Martin, because it is women who are responsible for the early education of children. He says,

> We neither reckon upon kings, queens, nor universities, to assist the country, but solely upon maternal influence--an influence which is exerted on the heart, which through the heart may direct the mind, and which, in order to save and regenerate the world, only requires to be properly directed.[43]

Here are the old ideas about feminine influence combined with the belief that this influence should be directed by education. Eliot's concurrence with passages like the one above have encouraged some critics to argue, as Bonnie Zimmerman does, that the "moral purpose in her novels was to emphasize the role played by women in diffusing human goodness throughout history."[44]

But Eliot's purpose is more complicated than Zimmerman suggests. The similarity of Aimé-Martin's thinking about the power of love to Feuerbach's is obvious. And Eliot's interest in his work, which predates her interest in Feuerbach by ten years, would have little importance if it were not for the fact that it helps to demonstrate her recognition that the qualities that Feuerbach admires had traditionally been considered feminine qualities. The attri butes that Aimé-Martin associates with women--a capacity for self-sacrifice inspired by love and the power to influ ence others that arises from it--are the same qualities that Feuerbach believes that all people should possess. Eliot adopts those moral values that had traditionally been considered feminine to develop her own moral vision.

Given this fact, it is hardly surprising to find Eliot writing to John Chapman as late as 1855 about an idea for an article which she had apparently been thinking about for

some time, the "Ideals of Womankind."[45] In fact, this article was never written, but Eliot did write two other essays about women while editing The Westminster Review. One of these essays was "Women in France: Madame de Sable." In it, she argues that there would be a great gap in French literature without the work of women writers, such as George Sand and Madame de Staël. But she goes on to say that an equally important contribution to French literature had been made by women like Madame de Sable, who lived during the seventeenth century, "women who are known rather by what they stimulated men to write than by what they wrote themselves."[46] In the salons of women like Marie de Sable, well-educated women discussed literature, philosophy, and science with many of the writers and scientists of the seventeenth century. In some cases these women influenced the work of the men, as Eliot argues that de Sable influenced the Maxims of de Rochefoucauld.

Implicit in Eliot's essay on women in France is the belief which she shares with Aimé-Martin that women should be educated equally with men. And it is the lack of a thorough education that is the real problem she writes about later in her essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." In this essay, she maintains that the sort of novels that many imperfectly educated women were writing during the nineteenth century tended "to confirm the popular prejudice

against the more solid education of women."[47] In other words, she wanted to make clear that it was not that women in general were not capable of writing well, but that the particular women who wrote the novels she is speaking of were not well-educated enough to write well. Both these essays as well as the one she mentioned but never wrote demonstrate Eliot's continuing interest in the role of women, particularly in relation to the doctrine of feminine influence and the education of women.

Eliot's thinking on the subject of the education of both women and men is closely related to the social and moral values that are embodied by her feminine ideal. It is her contention that the individual must be taught in such a way that he or she is encouraged to adopt the principles of the ideal. In another early letter to Maria Lewis, she says,

> I am more impressed than ever with a truth beautifully expressed in Woman's Mission. "Learning is only so far valuable as it serves to enlarge and enlighten the bounds of conscience."[48]

Eliot's devotion to the cause of an improvement in the education of women is revealed not only by the fact that she contributed to the founding of Girton College at Oxford but also by a remark she made in a letter to a friend. Speaking of education, she says that she believes "that

women ought to have the same fund of truth placed within their reach as men have."[49]

The only novel by Eliot that treats education in any detail is The Mill on the Floss. In that story, neither the haphazard education of Maggie Tulliver nor the misguided education of Tom can be said to be likely to "enlarge and enlighten" the consciences of either child. The education that Maggie receives at school is never explained in detail. She seems to be mostly self-taught, a process that allows her emotions to take precedence over rational thinking. Most of the books that interest Maggie as a child are highly emotional religious texts such as The History of the Devil and The Pilgrim's Progress. Her reading is wholly unregulated until her father discovers her interest in pictures of the devil in these books and prevents her from reading them. Though she is very intelligent and better suited to the type of education Tom gets, as her remarks to Tom's teacher show, Maggie does not get an opportunity to study the things her brother studies.

It is not surprising that, with other avenues closed to her, she turns to Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ as a guide to bring some meaning to her life. But as Philip Wakem points out, she adopts Thomas à Kempis' belief in self-abnegation to the exclusion of everything else. Philip tells her that "stupefaction is not resignation: and

it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance--to shut up all avenues by which the life of your fellow men might become known to you."[50] The mistakes that Maggie falls into demonstrate the dangers of a system that prevents women, as Eliot remarks in a letter, from "having opened to them the same store of acquired truth or beliefs as men have, so that their grounds for judgment may be as far as possible the same."[51]

On the other hand, Tom's education demonstrates the problems that arise from too great an emphasis on the ability to make judgments as the goal of education. Mr. Stelling's method of teaching Tom is quite rigid. The narrator remarks at one point that Stelling "was not the man to enfeeble and emasculate his pupil's mind by simplifying and explaining."[52] For example, Tom learns that there were once people who actually spoke Latin only when Maggie tells him about them. Presumably this is a detail that would enfeeble and emasculate his mind. This suggests that Maggie's less formal education might in some cases be better than Tom's more formal one. Stelling is interested only in imparting certain general rules to Tom, rules which he can use to evaluate all circumstances. He does not want to clutter up Tom's mind with extraneous information, nor does he want to introduce special cases.

In fact, Tom is unable to recognize special circumstances when they present themselves. After much work, he is able to learn particular Latin declensions, but he cannot recognize irregular genitive or dative cases. Stelling's method of teaching encourages the adoption of maxims, which, according to Mary Jacobus, are Eliot's equivalent in the novel of patriarchal law.[53] His teaching confirms in Tom a tendency he already possessed, as Eliot suggests when she says that his school years "turned out as comfortably for Tom as if he had been plied with cheese in order to remedy a gastric weakness which prevented him from digesting it."[54] Tom's tendency to make judgments based on certain general rules, as he does later when he judges Maggie, is not altered during his school years.

The most interesting thing about Tom's education is that it so closely resembles the curriculum provided by the English public school, which was supposed to contribute to the development of the perfect gentleman. As Philip Wakem tells Tom, he must learn the classics and geometry because every gentleman must learn them. But the effect of such an education on Eliot's Tom is very different from that on Hughes's Tom in Tom Brown's Schooldays, as Eliot's publisher, John Blackwood, commented in a letter to his brother. Blackwood says of The Mill on the Floss that "its hero is a wonderful picture of a boy and lifelike contrast

to the sort of Tom Brown ideals of what boys are."[55] There is evidence in her letters that Eliot had read Tom Brown's Schooldays, which suggests that the contrast between the two Toms that sprang to Blackwood's mind may have been deliberate on Eliot's part.[56] It also suggests that the attempt to create an ideal gentleman is often unsuccessful and that Hughes's account of Tom Brown's education is highly idealized.

Tom's experience at Mr. Stelling's, where he is at first the only pupil, is, in many ways, quite different from Tom Brown's experience at Rugby. However, in addition to their similar studies, there is one striking similarity between the experiences of the two Toms. While at school, each of them is thrown together with a boy who is sensitive and intelligent yet much weaker than himself. In Tom Brown's case, it is the headmaster who asks him to take the boy Arthur under his wing, hoping that Arthur will influence Tom as much as Tom influences him. And being thrown with Arthur does influence Tom's behavior and his attitudes to his studies and religion. In fact, by the end of the book, Tom Brown is described as having

> developed in his composition the capacity for taking the weakest side. This is not putting it strongly enough, it was a necessity with him, he couldn't help it any more than he could eating or drinking.[57]

Tom not only acquires all the virtues of Letwin's definition; he also becomes a hero, always helping those weaker than himself. As captain of the cricket team, Tom Brown goes so far as to allow Arthur to play at an important point in the game when there are many team members who might do a better job. His headmaster saw that he had a tendency to despise boys weaker than himself and attempted, successfully, to change him. Tom Brown's education does indeed "enlarge and enlighten the bounds of conscience"; in fact, his real education has little to do with the subjects that he studies. One might say that he acquires the feminine virtue of self-sacrifice as a direct result of his school experience.

In contrast, Tom Tulliver's education in The Mill on the Floss is strictly limited to what Mr. Stelling can drill into him from his geometry and Latin books. Like Tom Brown, Tom Tulliver must also live closely with a boy very different from himself. Tom dislikes the boy, Philip Wakem, not only because their fathers are enemies but also because he is a hunchback and as a result takes no interest in the boys' games at which Tom is so skillful. But unlike the headmaster at Tom Brown's school, Stelling does not concern himself with how the two boys are getting along. In fact, as I have already pointed out, he does not concern himself with any special needs that either of the boys

might have. They must get along together as well as they can without any guidance.

In spite of Stelling's neglect of them, it does seem at one point as if Tom and Philip might become friends and might even influence one another to change for the better. This possibility occurs when Tom injures his foot with a sword that he has borrowed from his fencing instructor. Philip, having suffered greatly himself because of his own deformity, immediately feels that Tom must be very much afraid that he will be lame. Having learned from the doctor that Tom will not be lame, he hastens to tell him so. Tom is grateful, and the two boys become friends for the extent of Tom's illness. However, once Tom regains his robust health and no longer needs the stories that Philip tells him to fill his time, they become increasingly less friendly. Eventually, Tom's insensitivity makes him say something that angers Philip, and the brief friendship is over. The outcome of this encounter is very different from the outcome of the very similar encounter in Tom Brown's Schooldays.

With this difference, Eliot seems to be suggesting that the kind of school experience that Tom Tulliver has is much more likely to occur than the one Tom Brown has. A boy is more likely to be taught by a Mr. Stelling than he is to be taught by an idealized Thomas Arnold. Eliot

describes Tom in this way:

> he was a boy who adhered tenaciously to impressions once received; as with all minds in which mere perception predominates over thought and emotion, the external remained to him rigidly what it was in the first instance.[58]

His education, which is the kind of education most middle-class boys, indeed, most gentlemen, were most likely to receive, reinforces his tendency to be rigid in his thinking, a tendency which Eliot clearly associates in The Mill on the Floss with the ideal of the gentleman.

Eliot's answer to the rigidity and selfishness that she finds at the heart of the gentlemanly ideal is her own feminine ideal. Hers is an active ideal, based in part upon the arguments made by Ludwig Feuerbach in his The Essence of Christianity. An enlightened self-sacrifice guided by love is the principle virtue of the feminine ideal. Perhaps even more important to the development of Eliot's ideal is her own thinking on the subject, which was influenced by such works as Louis Aimé-Martin's Woman's Mission. Aimé-Martin's beliefs about feminine influence echoed the ideas on the subject that were current in England during the nineteenth century. Under these combined influences, Eliot developed an alternative to the ideal of the gentleman. Throughout her career, she maintained her belief that self-sacrifice, motivated by love

and the desire to influence others for the good are the best alternative to the benign selfishness of the gentlemanly ideal.

While Eliot's opinion on the subject of the feminine ideal does not change appreciably over the course of her career, the social context in which the ideal is realized does broaden. From the small unified societies in Scenes of Clerical Life and Silas Marner, Eliot moves to the more complex societies portrayed in Romola and Middlemarch and, finally, to the broad social and political scene of Daniel Deronda. While Eliot examines the way in which her ideal can be realized on a personal level in the first two books, with Romola, she begins to examine how the ability to exert a beneficial influence on others that the ideal requires can be realized in the larger social and political world.

Scenes of Clerical Life is particularly interesting with regard to Eliot's feminine ideal since it is her first work of fiction. In it, the first characters who embody her feminine ideal appear. Though Milly Barton, who appears in the first story, "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," is not a successful embodiment of the ideal, Rev. Tryon, a character in "Janet's Repentance," is. And she succeeds with the character of Rev. Tryon and fails with the character of Molly for the same reasons that she

is to succeed or fail in later examples of her feminine ideal. Tryon is a successful character because she portrays him as having weaknesses and flaws, while Molly is portrayed as being wholly admirable. Finally, in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," Eliot gives the reader a portrait of the gentleman in Sir Christopher Cheverel against which many of the gentlemen in her later novels may be judged.

In Silas Marner, Eliot examines a society whose organizing principle, as Q. D. Leavis points out, is neighborliness.[59] This neighborliness is most fully realized in Dolly Winthrop, who is described as being "eager for duties." For Dolly, there are too many hours in the day and not enough people who need her help to enable her to fill those hours. Dolly not only visits Silas, bringing him food and comfort when his money is stolen; she also influences him to change in a way that gradually allows him to become a part of the community after he adopts Eppie. Under Dolly's influence Silas himself comes to represent Eliot's feminine ideal, and he, in turn, has an enormous influence on Eppie.

In Romola Eliot is concerned with a much wider political and social world than Silas Marner. Although the novel is not set in England, many of the characters in it share the qualities of the Victorian gentleman. Romola takes

place in fifteenth-century Florence during the time when Savonarola, the Dominican monk who attempted to reform the Catholic Church, was living and preaching in the city. By examining Savonarola's political and spiritual effects on the people of Florence, Eliot is exploring the limits of an individual's ability to exert the kind of influence on a society as a whole that her feminine ideal requires. Savonarola's influence on Romola herself is undeniable; her life is determined by the fact that she wholeheartedly accepts Savonarola's advice to sacrifice her own self-interest to the needs of others. But the desire for personal glory, which arises from the demands occasioned by Savonarola's attempt to reform the church and the city, is the thing that prevents him from achieving his goals. Eliot seems to suggest that a direct attempt to influence a whole society rather than just an individual is liable to be marred by personal ambition. In Romola, Eliot suggests that it is not possible to exert the kind of influence demanded by the feminine ideal in the political world as it is in an individual's personal relationships.

In Middlemarch, as in Romola, Eliot is concerned with how the feminine ideal can be realized in the political realm, but, unlike Romola, Middlemarch suggests that it is possible to exert a beneficial influence on society as a whole as well as on particular individuals. The novel is

about the way in which each character struggles to discover his vocation, or the way he struggles to fulfill his obligations despite having chosen the wrong vocation, and each character can be evaluated in terms of the kind of influence he exerts on others in the course of fulfilling those obligations. On the one hand, there is Caleb Garth, who has chosen very happily, and, on the other, there is the Rev. Farebrother, who would rather be a scientist than a vicar. However, both of them successfully embody Eliot's ideal as they sacrifice their self-interest, one on a financial level, the other on an emotional level, to influence Fred Vincy. More importantly, Eliot suggests through the characters of Dorothea and Will that an individual can exert a beneficial influence in the political sphere, as they work for reform during the time of the passage of the reform bills. Through the character of Bulstrode, Eliot reveals the consequences, not just to Bulstrode but to the society as a whole, of a failure to adhere to the feminine ideal. By engaging in bad business practices, Bulstrode endangers the well-being of many of the people of Middlemarch.

In Daniel Deronda, Eliot attempts to examine the way in which her feminine ideal should work on an even broader social and political scene. Deronda, having learned that he is Jewish and having been influenced by Mordecai,

travels to Palestine to work to found a Jewish state there. However, Eliot's examination of how her ideal can be realized on this level breaks down since she does not explain exactly what Deronda is going to do beyond the sacrifice of leaving his old life in England. The treatment of Deronda's interest in and influence upon Gwendolyn Harleth is a much more fully delineated account of the way the feminine ideal can work. Daniel Deronda also introduces some new elements in Eliot's characterization of the gentleman. With the character of Grandcourt, Eliot introduces the idea that there is something malign about some aspects of the ideal of the gentleman. Sir Hugo Mallinger, on the other hand, is the perfect public school gentleman; like so many of Eliot's gentlemen, though he is well-meaning, his effect on others is not always beneficial. Both these men differ markedly from Deronda, who, by the end of the book is no longer constricted by the role of the gentleman that he had learned from his guardian, and he embodies, though imperfectly, the feminine ideal. An examination of Daniel Deronda and the other three novels reveals that Eliot was not only offering an alternative to the feminine ideal of the gentleman; she was also attempting to examine the way the ideal might be realized in various social and political contexts and in a number of different human relationships.

Notes

[1] Gordon Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), VI, 44. Hereafter referred to as Letters.

[2] Harold Bloom, "On the Height," New York Review of Books, Sept. 26, 1985, p. 43.

[3] F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 87.

[4] Daniel Defoe, The Compleat English Gentleman (London: 1729), p. 4.

[5] Robin Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 34.

[6] Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel, p. 23.

[7] A. L. G. de Stael-Holstein, Letters on England (London: 1830), p. 133.

[8] de Stael-Holstein, Letters on England, p. 133.

[9] Robin Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel, p. 1.

[10] John Ruskin, Modern Painters (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, 1888), V, 262.

[11] J. R. de S. Honey, Tom Brown's Universe (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company, Inc., 1977), pp. 1-46.

[12] Mark Girouard, The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 130-44.

[13] Gordon Haight, George Eliot: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 4.

[14] John Henry Cardinal Newman, The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), p. 208.

[15] Cardinal Newman, The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated, pp. 208-10.

[16] Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel, p. 91.

[17] Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel, pp. 16-21.

[18] Cardinal Newman, The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated, p. 107.

[19] George Eliot, Felix Holt (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 581.

[20] Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel, pp. 37-83.

[21] Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 472.

[22] William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), p. 602.

[23] Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel, p. 71.

[24] Shirley Robin Letwin, The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 74.

[25] Letwin, The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct, pp. 68-73.

[26] George Eliot, Middlemarch (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 94.

[27] Letwin, The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct, p. 71.

[28] Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," in Matthew Arnold's Essays in Criticism: First Series, ed. Sister Thomas Marion Hocter, S. S. J. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 19.

[29] Haight, Letters, II, 153.

[30] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 52.

[31] Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 53.

[32] Bernard J. Paris, "George Eliot's Religion of Humanity," in George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. George Creeger (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 30.

[33] Haight, Letters, IV, 364.

[34] Haight, Letters, IV, 467.

[35] Haight, Letters, IV, 468.

[36] Richard Simpson, "George Eliot's Novels," in George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, ed. David Carroll (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 245.

[37] Carol Christ, "Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House," in A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1977), pp. 147-159.

[38] Coventry Patmore, "The Angel in the House," in Poems by Coventry Patmore introd. Basil Champneys (London: George Bell and Sons, 1906), p. 31.

[39] Mrs. Sarah Stickney Ellis, The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits (New York: Edward Walker, 1838), pp. 13-14.

[40] John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," in Sesame and Lilies (New York: Home Book Company, n.d.), p. 178.

[41] Haight, Letters, I, 66.

[42] Louis Aimé-Martin, The Education of Mothers: or the Civilization of Mankind by Women, in Women in the Nineteenth Century, ed. S. Margaret Fuller (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1845), p. 52.

[43] Louis Aimé-Martin, The Education of Mothers: or the Civilization of Mankind of Women, p. 38.

[44] Bonnie Zimmerman, "Felix Holt and the True Power of Womanhood," English Literary History, 46, No. 3 (1979), 432.

[45] Haight, Letters, II, 190.

[46] George Eliot, "Women in France: Madame de Sable," in Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 316.

[47] George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," in Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 316.

[48] Haight, Letters, I, 107.

[49] Haight, Letters, V, 58.

[50] George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 425.

[51] Haight, Letters, IV, 468.

[52] Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, p. 210.

[53] Mary Jacobus, "The Question of Language: Men of Maxims and The Mill on the Floss, in Writing and Sexual Difference, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 41.

[54] Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, p. 208.

[55] Haight, Letters, III, 234.

[56] Haight, Letters, V, 434.

[57] Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown's Schooldays (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1948), p. 244.

[58] Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, p. 239.

[59] Q. D. Leavis, introd., Silas Marner, by George Eliot (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 17.

CHAPTER II

Scenes of Clerical Life

Scenes of Clerical Life is particularly interesting to the reader who is aware of George Eliot's belief in a feminine ideal. It is interesting for two reasons. First, there are characters in all three of the stories, "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," and "Janet's Repentance," who embody the feminine virtue of self-sacrifice and who have the ability to influence others for good. Second, a problem that Eliot was never to overcome is apparent in these stories, especially in the first two. This problem is that Eliot is not always successful in accomplishing what U. C. Knoepflmacher calls "her efforts to fuse the factual and the ideal."[1] Eliot uses characters like Milly Barton in "Amos Barton" and the Rev. Tryon in "Janet's Repentance" to illustrate the values of her feminine ideal. But in her zeal to make these characters conform to the ideal, they sometimes become less real as human beings and merely function as examples illustrating Eliot's values. Eliot intends to write about only what can be made to seem real, but she also wants to present her ideal in as favorable circumstances as possible. She is a moral philosopher as well as a realist, and the two roles come in conflict in her

fiction.

These apparently contradictory goals are evident not only in Eliot's fiction but also in her letters. On one hand, she responds to a criticism from John Blackwood of one of the scenes in "Janet's Repentance" in this way:

> Art must be either real and concrete, or ideal and eclectic. Both are good and true in their way, but my stories are of the former kind. I undertake to exhibit nothing as it should be; I only try to exhibit some things as they have been or are, seen only through such a medium as my own nature gives me.[2]

Blackwood had written that he enjoyed the confirmation scene in "Janet" but that he wished that the officiating Bishop in the scene, "though doubtless a true sketch," had been "a better sample of the cloth."[3] Eliot's answer indicates that she is devoted enough to exhibiting "things as they are" to resist Blackwood's suggestions about what he believes readers might prefer their fictional clergy to be. She also says that she is not concerned with confirmations or Bishops in general "but with a particular confirmation, and a particular Bishop."[4] Her purpose is to present a real Bishop by giving him particular qualities that inevitably will make him less than ideal.

On the other hand, in other letters to Blackwood about the same story, Eliot seems to contradict her earlier remarks. Blackwood had passed a letter on to her which was written by a Rev. W. P. Jones. Rev. Jones maintains that

the first two parts of "Janet's Repentance" are about his own deceased brother and demands to know if anything further is to be published about him. Eliot responds to Blackwood by saying that "Mr. Tryon is not a portrait of any clergyman, living or dead. He is an ideal character, but I hope probable enough to resemble more than one evangelical clergyman of his day."[5] She goes on to say that she based the story on a real incident of persecution of an evangelical clergyman and adds that she filled in the details from her imagination. But it is not just the ideal figure of Tryon that is different from the real person. Other things have been changed as well, as she reveals in another letter:

> The real town was more vicious than my Milby; the real Dempster was far more disgusting than mine; the real Janet alas! had a far sadder end than mine, who will melt away from the reader's sight in purity, happiness and beauty.[6]

Eliot clearly has another purpose in addition to her desire to "exhibit things as they are." She also wants to suggest an alternative to the imperfect real by including an example of an ideal character in her stories.

The danger inherent in a purpose such as Eliot's is that ideal characters like those representing her feminine ideal may become so generalized that they make the story undramatic and ineffective. Eliot herself was aware of

this danger, as her essay on the poet Edward Young reveals. The essay "Worldliness and Otherworldliness: The Poet Young," which appeared in the Westminster Review, was published in 1857 between the writing of "Amos Barton" and "Mr. Gilfil." In the essay, Eliot criticizes Young for his "radical insincerity as a poetic artist" and for his "want of genuine emotion."[7] Both these faults, as she says, are linked to his adherence to abstractions. Young personifies abstract values rather than writing about real people who embody those values. Eliot argues that instead of writing about personified Virtue and Religion, he should be

> dwelling on virtue or religion as it really exists--in the emotions of a man dressed in an ordinary coat, and seated by his fire-side of an evening, with his hand resting on the head of his little daughter; in courageous effort for unselfish ends, in all the sublime self-renunciation and sweet charities which are found in the details of ordinary life.[8]

This passage suggests both of Eliot's purposes; it defines her feminine ideal of self-sacrifice and describes her goals as a realist. But it is also interesting for another reason. Some of the idealized figures of Eliot's fiction suffer from the same flaws as the personified virtues of Young's poem "Night Thoughts," which is denounced by Eliot. As Knoepflmacher says, many of her ideal characters function as

> passive illustrations of their creator's values; though fully delineated, they are inert exempla, closer to the essayistic pictures of Young and Cumming than to their animated prototypes in the fiction of George Eliot's predecessors.[9]

Eliot's efforts to fulfil the role of moral philosopher inevitably come in conflict with her devotion to realism.

Nowhere is this conflict more apparent than in the first story in the Scenes, "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton." This frequently quoted passage from the story illustrates that Eliot intends to put into practice her belief that the real drama of life is in the lives of ordinary people:

> Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones.[10]

The particular dull grey eyes that she is referring to here are Amos Barton's, and he is certainly less than ideal. Not only are Amos's appearance and grammar flawed. He is not nearly so good a preacher as the last Shepperton curate; in fact, he has lost many of the new parishioners the previous preacher had gained. In spite of this, he has a high opinion of his own effectiveness, not only as a preacher but as a spiritual advisor.

However, Amos's beliefs about himself are very far from the truth. He suffers from an inability or unwillingness to grasp practical realities, rather like the poet Young as described by Eliot.[11] Therefore, in his visits both to his wealthier parishioners as well as to those living in the workhouse, he always chooses precisely the wrong way of speaking to each. At the workhouse he preaches on the typological significance of unleavened bread, a subject the inhabitants are unable to grasp. Eliot remarks that if he had given a little snuff to Mrs. Brick, a longtime resident of the workhouse, his effect on her would have been far greater and more beneficial than it actually was. When Mrs. Brick indicates that she wants some snuff, he says,

> Ah well, you'll soon be going where there is no more snuff. You'll be in need of mercy then. You must remember that you may have to seek for mercy and not find it, just as you're seeking for snuff. (p. 64)

Similarly, when he visits Mrs. Patten, a wealthy widow who lives on an outlying farm, he talks to her about nothing but her sins and her need for mercy. She does not like these doctrines any better than she likes the fact that Amos has forbidden the singing of the wedding psalm. Eliot goes on to say that Amos

> on his last visit to Mrs. Patten, had urged her to enlarge her promised subscription to twenty pounds,

> representing to her that she was only a steward of her riches and that she could not spend them more for the glory of God than by giving a heavy subscription towards the rebuilding of Shepperton Church--a practical precept which was not likely to smooth the way to her acceptance of his theological doctrine. (p. 48)

Ironically, Amos, who is so concerned with abstractions like sin and mercy, does not act in a way that will bring about the realization of his ideals. He does not provide an example that others can emulate. Eliot is correct when she says that it will be difficult for the reader to feel sympathy for Amos, who is "the quintessential extract of mediocrity" (p. 85). Nevertheless it is Amos's imperfections that make him a more realistic and believable character than Milly, his wife.

Milly Barton more closely resembles the Victorians' passive feminine ideal than any other character in Eliot's fiction, and for this reason, there is more than a hint of satire in some of Eliot's descriptions of her. This description, for example, suggests that Milly is remarkably like Patmore's description of the angel in the house:

> She was a lovely woman--Mrs. Amos Barton; a large fair gentle Madonna, with thick close, chestnut curls beside her well-rounded cheeks, and with large tender short-sighted eyes. . . . Among strangers she was shy and tremulous as a girl of fifteen; she blushed crimson if anyone appealed to her opinion; yet that tall, graceful substantial presence was so imposing in its mildness, that men spoke to her with an agreeable sensation of timidity . . . Soothing unspeakable charm of gentle womanhood! which supersedes all acquisitions,

> all accomplishments. You would never have asked, at any period of Mrs. Amos Barton's life if she sketched or played the piano. You would even perhaps have been rather scandalized if she had descended from the serene dignity of being to the assiduous unrest of doing. (p. 54)

Milly's short-sighted eyes, her substantial presence, and her lack of accomplishments are not wholly admirable qualities, except to those who believe absolutely in the ideal of the angel in the house.

Many critics attribute the presence of such a thoroughly passive character in Eliot's fiction to the prevailing taste for sentimentality among Victorian readers, and there is undoubtedly some truth in this. After reading the story, Blackwood mentions Milly's highly sentimentalized death scene first and most admiringly.[12] It would be surprising if Eliot were not also subject to such influences. Derek and Sybil Oldfield, on the other hand, suggest that Milly is "a case of over-compensation on George Eliot's part for her own refusal to fulfil the Victorian ideal of Angel in the House."[13]

But the Oldfields believe that Eliot's thinking has been influenced solely by Feuerbach's humanist philosophy. They do not acknowledge that she has also been influenced by writers like Aimé-Martin, who argues that women should take an active role in the education of their children. Since Milly's charm "supersedes all acquisitions, all

accomplishments," she cannot be expected to help educate her children, a fact which accounts for the critical tone of the passage quoted above. Eliot is not successful in this first attempt to embody her feminine ideal in her fiction because she tries to use the same character, Milly, to suggest the failure of the ideal of the angel in the house as well as the value of her own feminine ideal.

Milly is completely self-sacrificing, even more self-sacrificing than Eliot's feminine ideal requires; she devotes herself absolutely to her husband and her six children. She does without nice clothes for herself, but spends almost all the time she is not taking care of her children in making clothes for them from her own old clothes or scraps of cloth. She even gets up at half-past five to darn stockings. The closest Milly comes to uttering a complaint is when she says that she cannot send the children to a neighbor's because she has exhausted all her ingenious methods of making shoes last longer than they were intended to.

Even when the Countess Czerlaski moves in with the Bartons, Milly does not complain. Although the Countess's stay contributes to their financial difficulties and makes Amos's parishioners think him a fool or a philanderer, Milly's reaction is to be "only vexed that her husband should be vexed--only wounded because he was misconceived"

(p. 100). Eliot explains Milly's devotion to the "superlatively middling" Amos by saying that marriage to him meant that her "sublime capacity of loving [would] have all the more scope" (p. 55). Because Amos is less than ideal, he has a greater need for Milly than would someone whom the reader might have chosen for her, and this greater need makes Milly more "angelic." In short, Eliot intends for the reader to see Milly as a person without flaws, a representative of the feminine ideal at its purest.

But a beneficial influence on others arising out of self-sacrifice is essential to Eliot's ideal, and it seems unlikely at first that Milly will be able to influence anyone. Unlike later embodiments of Eliot's ideal, she is too passive to have more than a superficial effect on Amos while she is alive. She does make his life more comfortable than it might have been had she not been so self-effacing, and in addition the fact that she is married to Amos makes his parishioners think more kindly of him. But only her illness and death bring about any change in him. His own suffering and his need for kindness make him aware of the same need in others, and he comes to see that he was not as kind to Milly as he should have been. Eliot describes his realization of something like Feuerbach's belief in the divinity of the human being when she describes the regret that everyone feels at the loss of a

loved one for having shown so little reverence for "that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know" (p. 111). Eliot leaves it to the reader to imagine that Amos will not be so unfeeling in the future when he visits the workhouse and is confronted with the weakness of the people who inhabit it. But she does make clear that he becomes aware of the exact nature of Milly's self-sacrificing love after her death by suggesting that he realizes that he had not been as loving as she.

A more active influence on Amos is exerted by his parishioners after Milly's death and, more particularly, by Mr. Cleves, the vicar of a neighboring parish. His parishioners had always felt that Amos needed their help more than they needed his. But after Milly's death, they give it far more willingly, in the form of sympathy and material aid. Mr. Cleves, however, is an even more active example of the feminine ideal. He is the first to offer Amos help after Milly's death:

> On the first news of Mr. Barton's calamity, he had ridden over from Tripplegate to beg that he might be made of some use, and his silent grasp of Amos' hand had penetrated like the painful thrill of life-recovering warmth to the poor benumbed heart of the stricken man. (p. 109)

Cleves does not simply offer sympathy; he helps Amos by officiating at Milly's funeral. Furthermore, he is the

only one of Amos's fellow clergymen who had seen the truth about him. At a clerical meeting, when the others are criticizing Amos for allowing the Countess to remain at the vicarage, Cleves defends him by saying that Amos had always seemed to him to be "a right-minded man, who has the knack of doing himself an injustice by his manner" (p. 96) and by suggesting that there must be a simple explanation for the situation. He effectively stifles one of the other clergymen by reminding him of his own flaws. Cleves is also active on behalf of his parishioners; he is described as a "true parish priest." Unlike Amos, he preaches sermons that everyone can understand. He is less concerned with advancing his own career by publishing a sermon, as Amos has done, on theological points that his parishioners cannot grasp than he is with being a true pastor to his flock. People think of him as someone who can help them in their difficulties. Cleves sacrifices his own best interests in an attempt to exert a good influence on others.

Cleves also differs markedly from Mr. Ely, the only clergyman in the story who comes close to fulfilling the role of the ideal gentleman. Mr. Ely fulfils Shirley Letwin's definition of the gentleman, as she defines him in The Gentleman in Trollope, by seeming to be both diffident and discriminating. Eliot describes him in this way:

> Mr. Ely never got into a warm discussion; he suggested what might be thought, but rarely said what he thought himself; he never let men or women see that he was laughing at them, and he never gave anyone an opportunity of laughing at him. (p. 74)

This is Mr. Ely's version of a gentlemanly diffidence; Mr. Ely has opinions which he expresses only indirectly, as when he says that the Countess goes to Shepperton Church, "drawn there, let us suppose, by Mr. Barton's eloquence" (p. 75). With this sardonic remark, Ely allows the man to whom he is speaking to believe that he agrees with his negative assessment of Barton without actually committing himself. He seems to be discriminating without being so. The strongest opinion that he allows himself is to say that "Barton might be more judicious" (p. 75). In Ely, the gentleman's objectivity becomes an avoidance of anything that might become unpleasant. In comparison, Amos's treatment of all his parishioners with the same lack of sympathy seems almost admirable; Amos does at least believe that he is doing them some good. The fact that he is not a gentleman is, in this first story by Eliot, a point in his favor, although he falls far short, in the beginning, of fulfilling the feminine ideal.

In "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," then, Eliot includes ideas about the gentleman and the feminine ideal that she will develop more fully later. Her belief

in the feminine virtue of self-sacrifice is already strong. It is significant, I think, that the first ideal figure in her fiction is Milly Barton, an "angel in the house." And it is interesting that, as Knoepflmacher says, Milly is used simply as "a device to assure us that the ideal can influence ordinary life."[14] This same use, or misuse, of the ideal is to occur repeatedly in Eliot's fiction, though never to such an unfortunate extent as here. In her determination to persuade the reader of the efficacy of the ideal, Eliot makes the mistake of describing characters when she should be presenting them dramatically, a mistake that John Blackwood noticed at once. In the first letter that he wrote to Lewes after having read "Amos Barton," Blackwood says,

> Perhaps the author falls into the error of trying too much to explain the characters of his actors by descriptions instead of allowing them to evolve in the action of the story.[15]

Blackwood puts his finger on a problem that is to reoccur in Eliot's fiction throughout her career, a problem that arises out of the conflict between her devotion to realism and her desire to suggest that her ideal can affect life.

Perhaps as a reaction to having included a far-too-perfect character in "Amos Barton," Eliot does not include such a character in the second story in the Scenes,

"Mr. Gilfil's Love Story." Though Maynard Gilfil himself is at one point self-sacrificing and is able to influence another for good, Eliot does not intend for the reader to regard him as such an impossibly perfect character as Milly Barton was. In fact, in response to another complaint from Blackwood about what he saw as a lack of dignity in the main characters, she has this to say:

> My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity, and sympathy. And I cannot stir a step aside from what I feel to be true in character. If anything strikes you as untrue to human nature in my delineations, I shall be very glad if you will point it out to me, that I may reconsider the matter. But alas! inconsistencies and weaknesses are not untrue.[16]

This is Eliot's response to Blackwood's suggestion that she should make Maynard less devoted to Tina, a woman who is in love with another less-than-ideal man. Blackwood disapproved of what seemed to him to be a lack of self-respect in Gilfil, a quality that, as Shirley Letwin has shown, Victorian society believed that the gentleman must have.[17]

But Eliot has conceived Maynard and Tina as mixed human beings, and their feelings are entirely possible, even highly probable, given the set of circumstances in which she has placed them. Eliot reacts in much the same way when Blackwood suggests later that she should have made

Tina dream of killing Wybrow instead of taking a knife and actually setting out to kill him. Tina had been conceived as a hot-blooded character, given to fits of anger, and Eliot would not revise this psychological conception for propriety's sake. By portraying all the characters in "Gilfill" as having both good and bad qualities, she intended to make the story more realistic.

Nevertheless, the main action of "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" does not seem "real" to the reader; as the Oldfields point out, the story is a sentimental melodrama that contains "just one moment of real insight, for which the whole story seems to have been written."[18] This time the plot of the story itself is the ideal, the vehicle for conveying one of the tenets of Eliot's feminine ideal. The attempted murder, the wronged woman, and the despairing husband are the stuff of melodrama, but the moment for which the story is written is quite interesting. That moment occurs when Gilfil goes to get Tina after she has run away because of her guilt at having intended to kill Wybrow. She believes that to have thought of killing him is just as bad as to have actually done it. But instead of judging her, Maynard responds with understanding:

> "No, my Tina," answered Maynard slowly, waiting a little between each sentence; "we mean to do wicked things that we never could do just as we mean to do good or clever things that we never could do. Our

> thoughts are often worse than we are, just as they are often better than we are."[19]

Maynard goes on to say that the fault is not all her own; Wybrow is also to blame because he did things to provoke her anger. Because of his love for Tina, he has been aware all along that Wybrow had not been behaving honorably. Maynard therefore sees her action differently than would someone who looked at it in a purely objective manner as an isolated event. Under his influence, Tina does recover from her feelings of guilt. Maynard's rescue of Tina is a believable action in a story filled with melodramatic, unrealistic events.

Maynard has a profound influence on Tina, much like that described by Louis Aimé-Martin, whose work so greatly impressed Eliot in her youth. In fact, Eliot describes Maynard's love for Tina in much the same way that Aimé-Martin describes maternal influence in The Education of Mothers. Aimé-Martin maintains that progress depends "solely upon maternal influence--an influence which is exerted on the heart, which through the heart may direct the mind."[20] Eliot's description of Maynard's feelings as he sets out to bring Tina home echoes Aimé-Martin's words:

> In the love of a brave and faithful man there is always a strain of maternal tenderness; he gives out again those beams of protecting fondness which were shed on him as he lay on his mother's knee. (p. 230)

It is love that makes an influence for good possible, and it is Maynard's genuine love for Tina that sets him apart, at this early period of his life, from the other characters in the story. At this point, Maynard embodies Eliot's feminine ideal.

But in the frame that surrounds Maynard's love story, he is not quite the same man. At first, Eliot's assertions that Maynard Gilfil, the elderly clergyman to whom the reader is introduced at the beginning of the story, is less than ideal are puzzling. He seems a kindly old gentleman, and that, in fact, is what he is in his old age, nothing more and nothing less. The story, ostensibly written thirty years after his death, begins with a description of his parishioners' feelings at his funeral. The narrator says that they felt such great respect for him that they would have paid for the black crêpe to hang around the pulpit if his nephew had not done it. In fact, respect is the word always used to describe the villagers' regard for Mr. Gilfil. Despite the fact that he "approximates his accent and mode of speech to theirs" (p. 125), they are always aware that there is a distinction between themselves and their parson.

Gilfil's performance of his duties as a clergyman is characterized by the kind of lack of activity that Newman refers to in The Idea of the University as being typical of

the gentleman. For example, his parishioners like his sermons because they are familiar with them. He has a stack of sermons that he keeps in a pile, and he chooses one at random to deliver each Sunday. The sermons concern the nature of wrong-doing and well-doing, things "lying quite on the surface of life, and having little to do with deep spiritual matters" (p. 126). His remarks have little effect on the listeners, except to confirm their opinions about their neighbors' wrong-doing and their own well-doing. His greatest expression of displeasure at the behavior of others is expressed through sarcasm, as when he disapproves of the Oldinports' treatment of their tenants. He does not give them the kind of help that he had given Tina earlier in his life, help of the kind which Eliot believes can only be inspired by love. He locks this part of himself away in Tina's room. Mr. Gilfil's theology amounts to what Thomas Noble calls the "high-and-dry orthodoxy of the eighteenth century which lingered on unchanged in such remote parishes as Shepperton."[21] As a gentleman, Gilfil does not sacrifice his own comfort and ease in an attempt to influence others for good.

It is not surprising that Mr. Gilfil should be the sort of person he is in his old age, as he was raised by a man whom Eliot calls "as fine a specimen of the old English gentleman as could well have been found in those venerable

days of cocked-hats and pigtails" (p. 135). With Sir Christopher Cheverel, Eliot begins her practice of making her gentleman a baronet, and both the good and bad qualities that he possesses are typical of many of the gentlemen in Eliot's later novels. Although Sir Christopher means to act kindly in his roles as landlord, husband, and guardian, the rigidity of his thinking and the moral blindness that arises from it make him act in ways that cause suffering to himself and others. In his role as landlord, Sir Christopher is convinced that he knows what is best for his tenants, regardless of how they feel about it.

This moral blindness is illustrated by an incident at the beginning of the story in which Sir Christopher is approached by a widow who wants to continue living and working on the farm that she and her husband had worked for years. In spite of the fact that it is Sir Christopher's policy never "to allow widows to stay on their husbands' farms" (p. 138), Mrs. Hartopp begs him to let her work the farm with her sons. His response is to say that she must sell her stock because "A woman's always silly enough, but she's never quite as great a fool as she can be until she puts on a widow's cap" (p. 138). Although Mrs. Hartopp tries to prove that a woman can run a farm by herself by referring to a great-aunt who had run her own farm for twenty years, Sir Christopher cannot be shaken from his

belief. After Mrs. Hartopp leaves in despair, however, he writes a letter to his bailiff directing that Mrs. Hartopp be moved to an empty cottage on his estate and that a little land be set aside for her to keep pigs and a cow. Sir Christopher acts according to certain rules in which he has an absolute faith. Although he is an essentially kind patriarch, his adherence to his own set of beliefs makes him blind to the fact that Mrs. Hartopp's plan might well be the better one. Sir Christopher's dismissal of Mrs. Hartopp's ideas indicates that the gentleman's attitude toward women is particularly condescending.

Eliot finds a metaphor for Sir Christopher's devotion to his beliefs in his determination to change the architectural design of his house from the Palladian to the Gothic. He sacrifices the stables, the wine cellar, and even much of the furniture in the house to his purpose, and George Eliot admires this devotion. The narrator remarks that Sir Christopher possessed "some of that sublime spirit which distinguishes art from luxury, and worships beauty apart from self-indulgence" (p. 159). In fact, this progressive gesture distinguishes Sir Christopher from some of the more conservative gentlemen in Eliot's later novels, such as Sir Hugo in Daniel Deronda. With his attempt to create an ideal world, Sir Christopher represents a tribute to and, at the same time, an indictment of the gentleman. For the

reader is aware that Sir Christopher pursues his plans with regard to the house with the same blindness to the needs of others with which he runs the estate and the family.

When discussing the baronet's plans for the house, his servants take it for granted that his rights as a gentleman entitle him to do as he thinks best, no matter what Lady Cheverel thinks of the plan: "Sir Christopher'll hev his own way, <u>that</u> you may take your oath. An' i' the right on't too. He's a gentleman born, an's got the money" (p. 156). The reader never knows exactly what Lady Cheverel thinks, as she submits so completely to her husband that she never expresses an opinion. But she is not as interested as her husband is in the changes:

> . . . for though Lady Cheverel did not share her husband's architectural enthusiasm, she had too rigorous a view of a wife's duties, and too profound a deference for Sir Christopher, to regard submission as a grievance. (p. 159)

Because he is a gentleman, Sir Christopher's plans are never questioned. Eliot, speaking through the narrator, recognizes the nobility of his plan for the house, but is aware that much is sacrificed in pursuit of it. While the rigidity of his thinking serves a noble purpose in this instance, the same is not true of his behavior towards his wards, whose lives he tries to organize just as he organizes the workmen rebuilding his house.

Sir Christopher is well-intentioned when he plans the lives of Maynard, Tina, and Captain Wybrow, but, in this case, his failure to make himself aware of their feelings brings disastrous results. With Sir Christopher Eliot establishes this inability or unwillingness to imagine the needs and feelings of others as characteristic of the gentleman. He is totally unaware of Tina's love for Wybrow or of Wybrow's attentions to her. Neither he nor Lady Cheverel seems to love Tina or Wybrow. Although their motive in rescuing Tina in Italy was kind and Sir Christopher is spoken of as being fond of her, they seem to welcome her from the beginning as someone who can be useful to them. In fact, they never consider actually adopting her. When it develops that she has a talent for singing, she becomes simply an ornament for their beautiful house. And Wybrow seems to be valued for much the same reason. Chosen as Sir Christopher's heir because of an argument the baronet had with his eldest sister, Wybrow is also valued more for the negative virtue of never creating any unpleasantness than for any positive virtue.

It is little wonder, then, that Sir Christopher fails to see that Wybrow is treating Tina badly or that she is not in love with Maynard, as he had hoped. Just as he uses stones and mortar to build a new facade for his house, Sir Christopher hopes to use Wybrow, Tina, and Maynard to

fulfil his plans for the future. Wybrow will marry well and return to live at Cheverel Manor, and Maynard and Tina will marry and live in the vicarage in the nearby village. This is all part of Sir Christopher's plan and, as he says to Maynard,

> "it really is a remarkable thing that I never in my life laid a plan, and failed to carry it out. I lay my plans well, and I never swerve from them--that's it. A strong will is the only magic." (p. 212)

Sir Christopher attempts to influence others through the imposition of his will, not through love, as Maynard influences Tina. To Eliot's way of thinking, he lacks real power because he is not motivated by love.

The way in which Sir Christopher comes to see that he has been wrong is significant with regard to Eliot's feminine ideal. He learns through suffering, just as Amos Barton does. After Wybrow's death, one of the first things he says is "Perhaps I've been wrong in not forgiving my sister. She lost one of her sons a little while ago. I've been too proud and obstinate" (p. 224). Maynard responds by saying that humility and tenderness can only be learned through suffering and goes on to say that "God sees that we are in need of suffering for it is falling more and more heavily on us" (p. 224). And after Sir Christopher learns of the relationship between Wybrow and Tina, he realizes

that, though he thought he saw everything, he was blind to what was going on around him. The fact that he attempts to set things straight by adopting one of his sister's sons as his heir further proves that he has learned through suffering. He has gone through an experience that is not unlike that which Eliot believes to have produced the feminine ideal. When she says in a letter that women have "an art which does mend nature" because they "have the worst share in existence," she is making the same learning-through-suffering argument.[22] She argues here that because women have suffered, they have a greater capacity for love. Similarly, because Sir Christopher suffers, he finally acts with love for his sister and nephew. The stereotyped plot does not prevent Eliot from making the argument she wants to make about the gentleman. The portrait of Sir Christopher suggests that she admires the ideal of the gentleman and at the same time recognizes its profound flaws.

In "Janet's Repentance," the last story in the series, Eliot is concerned with a much lower order of society than she is in "Mr. Gilfil." There is no gentleman like Sir Christopher in Milby. There, the term gentleman is associated with a man who is best known for his gay habits, for the keeping of harriers and other expensive animals, and for talking scandal. In fact, as the narrator remarks,

> the standard of morality in Milby, you perceive, was not inconveniently high in those good old times, and an ingenious vice or two was what every man expected of his neighbor.[23]

This accounts for both the rise of the lawyer Dempster and the need for a clergyman like Mr. Tryon, who embodies Eliot's feminine ideal. Dempster thrives because the standard of morality is not high; people are proud to have an unscrupulous lawyer, though they would not, they say, approve of such conduct in their personal lives. They actually admire his drunkenness, saying that he can argue a case better while drunk than most lawyers can while sober. Even Mr. Jerome, who embodies the feminine ideal in a less exalted role than Mr. Tryon, is tolerant of Dempster's obvious flaws. And because Dempster is useful, everyone overlooks his cruelty to his wife, a cruelty that the narrator explains by saying that it, "like every other vice, requires no motive outside itself--it only requires opportunity" (p. 334).

In this story, Eliot is not so much concerned with exploring the origin of evil like Dempster's as she is with examining the conditions under which it is allowed to flourish and suggesting a way of dealing with it. As Joan Bennett has pointed out, Eliot is beginning to use the sort of organic form in "Janet's Repentance" that she is to use in her later novels. In "Janet," there is "an inner circle

(a small group of individuals involved in a moral dilemma) surrounded by an outer circle (the social world within which the dilemma must be resolved)."[24] The moral dilemma in this case is Janet's, the social world is Milby, and the resolution is brought about by Mr. Tryon, who exerts a profound influence on Janet and a lesser, though significant, influence on the town as a whole.

It is interesting that in "Janet's Repentance" Eliot makes the representative of her feminine ideal of self-sacrifice and influence an evangelical clergyman. In fact, he is in every way the direct opposite of the gentlemanly Gilfil. Instead of making a distinction between himself and his parishioners and keeping himself aloof from their problems, Tryon lives in the same neighborhood that they do and tries to influence their lives directly. Though, like Gilfil, he is from a good family, he has not gone into the ministry because it is one of the only alternatives that a gentleman has in the choice of a career. Rather, he has entered the ministry in a spirit of self-sacrifice motivated by yet another of Eliot's stereotyped incidents, this time involving Tryon's having been the partial cause of a young girl's death. But in spite of this unrealistic detail, Eliot is able to make the point that he is moved to self-sacrifice by love that comes to him through suffering, just as it does to Amos Barton and Sir Christopher

Cheverel. Only when she learns that he too has suffered does Janet start to think that he might be able to help her. This "fellowship of suffering," as Eliot calls it here, is again the thing that makes a good influence possible.

But in this story, Eliot is not only making an argument for the efficacy of the feminine ideal; she is coming to terms with evangelicalism as well. In fact, as David Lodge remarks, she seems to have finally made peace with the religion she practiced in her youth.[25] One does feel that it is Eliot speaking when the narrator says that

> Our subtlest analysis of schools and sects must miss the essential truth, unless it be lit up by the love that sees in all forms of human thought and work, the life and death struggles of separate human beings. (p. 322)

This remark should have prevented the surprise of some of Eliot's friends who felt that she was wholeheartedly embracing evangelicalism in "Janet's Repentance." Rather, she is arguing for tolerance of evangelicalism, which, though imperfect, can, at its best, be an influence for good. As the narrator says of Mr. Tryon,

> a critic might perhaps say that he made the mistake of identifying Christianity with a too narrow doctrinal system; that he saw God's work too exclusively in antagonism to the world, the flesh, and the devil; that his intellectual culture was too limited. (p. 322)

However, the narrator goes on to say that he is not poised on that lofty height, but "is on the level and in the press with him" (p. 322) where he can see the very real good that Tryon does in spite of his imperfections. As a representative of Eliot's feminine ideal, Tryon comes far closer to being a realistic portrait than Milly Barton does.

This makes Tryon very different from the Victorian idea of the hero whom, Eliot says, "believes nothing but what is true, feels nothing but what is exalted, and does nothing but what is graceful" (p. 320). This description of the hero is remarkably similar to Eliot's description of the heroes who appear in what she calls the White Neck-Cloth School of literature in "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." In these novels, the evangelical curate is, according to Eliot, "always a rather insipid personage," and the novelist always seeks "her subjects among titles and carriages."[26] The type of clergyman who appears in Lady Caroline Lucy Scott's The Old Grey Church, a novel published in 1856, is a gentleman, according to Eliot, who, unlike Mr. Tryon, associates only with the upper classes. The way that the ladies who are binding books for Mr. Tryon regard him reflects attitudes similar to those in the White Neck-Cloth School. Eliot is mocking both the novels and the ladies in this scene in which the young women are all portrayed as being in love with Tryon.

The fact that they believe Tryon to be a gentleman is at least as important to the ladies as are his evangelical beliefs. One cannot imagine these ladies feeling a greater admiration for Tryon after hearing about his past life, as Janet does. Still, Eliot suggests that even the imperfect understanding of the ladies is an improvement over the way they were before, when she says that "No one could deny that evangelicalism had wrought a change for the better in Rebecca Linnet's person" (p. 265). Mr. Tryon's effect on the people of Milby is not always ideal, but Eliot does not expect it to be. She believes, as she says in "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," that

> the real drama of Evangelicalism--and it has abundance of fine drama for any one who has genius enough to discern and reproduce it--lies among the middle and lower classes.[27]

The story of Mr. Tryon's influence upon Janet Dempster and upon others in Milby is just such a drama.

The reason that Mr. Tryon is able to exert so profound an influence upon others is because of one of the so-called imperfections that set him apart from the more widely accepted ideal hero, or gentleman, of the Victorian period. That imperfection is egoism. Eliot says of true heroes that "their very deeds of self-sacrifice are sometimes only the rebound of a passionate egoism. So it was with

Mr. Tryon" (p. 322). The fact that Tryon's belief in evangelicalism and in himself as its servant is so passionate does not, in Eliot's view, negate the good that he is able to do. In fact, it enhances it. This kind of self-sacrifice arising from egoism is one of the greatest contrasts between representatives of Eliot's feminine ideal and the ideal gentleman.

One of the characteristics of the gentleman, as described by Shirley Letwin, is diffidence, which prevents him from feeling an absolute certainty that his opinions are sound.[28] Diffidence makes self-sacrifice impossible for the gentleman since he can never feel strongly enough that his ideas are correct. Because he cannot feel strongly, he must fall back on the kind of thinking that Eliot attributes in this story to people who judge Tryon too harshly. She refers to them as

> persons possessing a great deal of that facile psychology which prejudges individuals by means of formulae, and casts them without further trouble, into duly lettered pigeon-holes. (p. 309)

This kind of attitude is remarkably similar to the moral rigidity that is the goal of the gentlemanly schooling that Tom Tulliver receives in The Mill on the Floss. The individual who judges according to formulae cannot influence others for good as Mr. Tryon does.

When Tryon talks to Janet after she has been thrown out of the house by her husband, Eliot describes his influence on her in this long passage:

> Blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another! Not calculable by algebra, not deducible by logic, but mysterious, effectual, mighty as the hidden process by which the tiny seed is quickened, and bursts forth into tall stem and broad leaf, and glowing tasseled flower. Ideas are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in thin vapour, and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made flesh; they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft responsive hands, they look at us with sad sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, and its love. Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame. (p. 364)

Eliot's feminine ideal is exemplified in those who embody it by the power to influence others, not solely through logic or ideas but through the sincerity and depth of their feelings. Eliot, like Feuerbach, believes that it is possible for an individual to draw upon the capacity for love and goodness that is deep within him to influence others or to respond to the influence of others.[29]

The difference between the kind of active influence that Mr. Tryon exerts and the influence of the passive angel-in-the-house is illustrated by Eliot's portrayal of Dempster's mother. Dempster's relationship with his mother is described as the last good thing in his life. It is

true that he does not beat her as he beats his wife and that he takes her for walks in the garden on the infrequent occasions when he thinks of it. But Mrs. Dempster can hardly be described as an influence for good in her son's life. She is described as having little love for Janet, and she blames Janet's mother for sympathizing too strongly with her daughter. She dotes on her son, refuses to acknowledge his faults, and never intervenes to stop quarrels before they get violent.

In the following heavily ironic passage, Eliot suggests that Mrs. Dempster's passivity contributes to the trouble rather than alleviates it:

> Old Mrs. Dempster had that rare gift of silence and passivity which often supplies the absence of mental strength; and whatever were her thoughts, she said no word to aggravate the domestic discord. Patient and mute, she sat at her knitting through many a scene of quarrel and anguish; resolutely she appeared unconscious of the sounds that reached her ears. (p. 296)

To Eliot, who believed with Aimé-Martin that a mother's influence is the most important influence on a man's life, Mrs. Dempster's passivity is not benign. Eliot is not necessarily suggesting that his mother's passivity is the only factor contributing to Dempster's cruelty. But it must have contributed to his belief that he will not be punished no matter what crime he commits, in his business or in his home.

One of the things Mrs. Dempster dislikes about Janet is that she has so many interests outside her home. Mrs. Dempster imagines that her son could have been good if he had had his wife's exclusive love. She would have Janet be more like the women Eliot mocked earlier in the book-binding scene. The narrator, discussing the marriageability of certain of the young ladies, remarks that

> When a man is happy enough to win the affections of a sweet girl, who can soothe his cares with crochet, and respond to all his most cherished ideas with beaded urn-rings and chair-covers in German wool, he has, at least, a guarantee of domestic comfort, whatever may await him out-of-doors. (p. 266)

This is a bitter denunciation of the ideal of the angel-in-the-house, who, as Eliot portrays her, is unable to understand her husband's interests or to help him in any way. This is just the sort of wife and mother that Mrs. Dempster herself had been, and the result is far from satisfactory. She is not able to exert the influence over her son that the ideal of the angel-in-the-house promises. In "Janet's Repentance," Eliot effectively argues for the efficacy of her feminine ideal and, at the same time, reveals the flaws in the ideal of the angel-in-the-house and in the ideal of the gentleman, or hero, as she refers to him here.

While Eliot's ideas about the feminine ideal are most effectively presented in "Janet's Repentance," the other

two stories are also interesting in terms of the development of that ideal. By the time she wrote the last story, she had progressed far from the unrealistic example of the ideal that she created in Milly Barton. But Milly provides the reader with some of the best evidence in any of Eliot's fiction that she believes most strongly in the feminine virtue of self-sacrifice and the good influence that arises from it. And while the incidents in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" are stereotyped and some of the characters are unrealistic Eliot's beliefs about the ideal of the gentleman are more clearly presented in that story than they will ever be again. While she admires the gentlemanly ideal, she clearly rejects it in favor of her own feminine ideal. Finally, "Janet's Repentance" promises the development of an organic form that Eliot will successfully employ in her later work, most notably in Silas Marner.

Notes

[1] U. C. Knoepflmacher, George Eliot's Early Novels (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 57.

[2] Gordon Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), II, 362.

[3] Haight, Letters, II, 360.

[4] Haight, Letters, II, 375.

[5] Haight, Letters, II, 375.

[6] Haight, Letters, II, 347.

[7] George Eliot, "Worldliness and Unworldliness: The Poet Young," in A George Eliot Miscellany, ed. F. B. Pinion (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982), pp. 16-17, 18.

[8] Eliot, "Worldliness and Otherworldliness: The Poet Young," p. 19.

[9] Knoepflmacher, George Eliot's Early Novels, p. 58.

[10] George Eliot, "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," in Scenes of Clerical Life, ed. David Lodge (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 81. In the future, references to this story will be given following the quotation.

[11] Knoepflmacher, George Eliot's Early Novels, p. 57.

[12] Haight, The George Eliot Letters, p. 272.

[13] Derek and Sybil Oldfield, "'Scenes of Clerical Life': The Diagram and the Picture," in Critical Essays on George Eliot, ed. Barbara Hardy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 10.

[14] Knoepflmacher, George Eliot's Early Novels, p. 56.

[15] Haight, The George Eliot Letters, II, 272.

[16] Haight, The George Eliot Letters, II, 299.

[17] Shirley Robin Letwin, The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 71-2.

[18] Derek and Sybil Oldfield, "'Scenes of Clerical Life': The Diagram and the Picture," p. 7.

[19] George Eliot, "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," in Scenes of Clerical Life, ed. David Lodge (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 235. In the future, references to this story will be given following the quotation.

[20] Louis Aimé-Martin, The Education of Mothers: or the Civilization of Mankind by Women, Women in the Nineteenth Century, ed. S. Margaret Fuller (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1845), p. 52.

[21] Thomas Noble, George Eliot's Scenes of Clerical Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 166.

[22] Haight, Letters, IV, 364.

[23] George Eliot, "Janet's Repentance," in Scenes of Clerical Life, ed. David Lodge (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 252.

[24] Joan Bennett, George Eliot: Her Mind and Art (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 101.

[25] David Lodge, introd., Scenes of Clerical Life, by George Eliot (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 30.

[26] George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," in A George Eliot Miscellany, ed. F. B. Pinion (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Nobles Books, 1982), p. 15.

[27] Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," p. 15.

[28] Letwin, The Gentleman in Trollope: Individualism and Moral Conduct, p. 69.

[29] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 50-64.

CHAPTER III

Silas Marner

Eliot is far more successful in combining the real and the ideal in Silas Marner than she is in any of her other novels. The reason for her greater success is that she does not attempt to use an impossibly perfect character to illustrate her feminine ideal. There is no ideal figure in Silas Marner such as Milly Barton or even one like Rev. Tryon. Instead, Eliot combines the legendary tale of Silas's fall and redemption with the realistic story of Godfrey Cass's irrevocable act, partial redemption, and ultimate punishment. As Knoepflmacher says, "Godfrey's plausible loss is interwoven with Silas's strange gain."[1] On the one hand, the change in Silas takes place as a result of what Eliot calls in a letter "the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations."[2] These include both the influence of the child Eppie and the influence of Dolly Winthrop, the character in the novel who more than any other exhibits the "feminine" quality of self-sacrifice. Under their influence, Silas himself comes to embody the feminine ideal.

On the other hand, Godfrey's partial redemption is achieved through the influence of Nancy Lammeter, who comes

far closer than any other character in Silas Marner to representing the ideal gentleman, at least as he has evolved in Raveloe. The rigidity of Nancy's thinking is remarkably similar to the moral rigidity exhibited by Sir Christopher in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story." Again, Eliot suggests that the code of the gentleman is not adequate for dealing with people and events that are not exactly as it has decreed they should be. In addition, she uses the character of Squire Cass, who is regarded as a gentleman by the villagers, to suggest that the social order, with the squire at its head, is breaking down. The details of the squire's behavior, which Q. D. Leavis believes to be evidence of Eliot's radical leanings,[3] can also be seen as evidence of her belief that the gentlemanly ideal often does not operate as it was intended to do because of flaws in the character of the "so-called" gentleman, flaws permitted and even encouraged by the ideal itself.

Though the book is named for Silas Marner, the village of Raveloe and its inhabitants, particularly the Casses, are equally important. Their realistic story balances the legendary tale of Silas.[4] I propose to look first at the character who sets the standards by which most of the villagers live. The villagers regard Squire Cass as the greatest of gentlemen, though he displays little of the sense of responsibility for others or devotion to a purpose

that characterizes Sir Christopher Cheverel in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story." When Eliot turns her attention in chapter three to Raveloe and its inhabitants, the first person she mentions is Squire Cass. The narrator refers to him as the "greatest man in Raveloe" and says that his tenants think of him as if he had been a lord. As Leavis suggests, this comparison is hardly complimentary to the aristocracy,[5] as the Squire is portrayed as a member of a group that was "to carry the race of small squires and yeoman down that road to ruin for which extravagant habits and bad husbandry were plentifully anointing their wheels."[6] The Squire regards even the Napoleonic wars as a "peculiar favour of Providence towards the landed interest" (p. 71), complaining to his son at one point that the newspapers have mentioned the possibility of peace.

In fact, only the high prices generated by the war have kept the squire's farms from going under as a result of his bad management:

> This was his system with his tenants: he allowed them to get into arrears, neglect their fences, reduce their stock, sell their straw, and otherwise go the wrong way--and then, when he became short of money in consequence of this indulgence, he took the hardest measures and would listen to no appeal. (p. 119)

The Squire's combination of laxity with severity is worse than no management at all. It is a kind of selfishness; he

has none of the sense of responsibility for his tenants, indeed for the village as a whole, that characterizes Sir Christopher Cheverel in "Gilfil." Furthermore, as Henry Auster has shown, the Squire's attitudes and behavior are reflected in the village as a whole; though he does not possess the qualities of the gentleman, he does exert a gentleman's influence.[7] The Squire's selfishness, a quality encouraged, according to Letwin, by the ideal of the gentleman, affects not only himself and his family but the community as a whole.[8]

The community is affected in two ways by the Squire. First, the example he sets them as the greatest man in Raveloe encourages in them the same sort of laxity that he exhibits in everything he does. Everything about him--his slovenly appearance, his wastefulness, his laziness, and his unwarranted pride--provides an example for the villagers that is as bad in its way as his poor management of the land. The scene that best illustrates these flaws occurs in chapter nine. The Squire rises late and appears carelessly dressed, at breakfast, where he thoughtlessly indulges his deerhound by giving him "enough bits of beef to make a poor man's holiday dinner" (p. 121). This detail strongly supports Leavis's argument that Eliot's portrait of the Squire is a reaction against a class of which she greatly disapproved.[9] Eliot is also critical of the

Squire's laziness, as this remark illustrates:

> The Squire's life was quite as idle as his sons', but it was a fiction kept up by himself and his contemporaries in Raveloe that youth was exclusively the period of folly, and that their aged wisdom was constantly in a state of endurance mitigated by sarcasm. (p. 12)

The Squire's behavior is emulated by his contemporaries, though there is nothing in his appearance or behavior to warrant admiration. His pride is based solely upon the fact that "his family, his tankards, and everything that was his, were the oldest and the best" (p.121), and the people of Raveloe, accustomed to admiring the Casses, continue to admire the present Squire because he is a Cass, though he does not deserve their admiration.

Significantly, Eliot attributes the family's decline in the person of the present Squire to the fact that "the Squire's wife had died long ago, and the Red House was without that presence of the wife and mother which is the fountain of wholesome love and fear in parlour and kitchen" (p. 72). There is certainly no hint in the Red House of the kind of self-sacrificing love that Eliot's feminine ideal requires. Instead, the Squire's patronizing manner and selfish behavior have imposed themselves on the villagers as what Leavis calls "an acceptable image of gentility."[10] Ben Winthrop, though he is married to the excel-

lent Dolly, admires Godfrey as someone who is willing and able to knock others down more easily than anyone else can. As Leavis says, this is apparently what the gentry are expected to do. Furthermore, most of the villagers seem to have the same attitude towards work as the Squire.

But early in the book, Eliot has reminded the reader that every action has its consequences, using an image that is remarkably similar to the image of the web that she is to use later in Middlemarch:

> . . . our old-fashioned country life had many different aspects, as all life must have when it is spread over a various surface, and breathed on variously by multitudinous currents from the winds of heaven to the thoughts of men, which are for ever moving and crossing each other with incalculable results. (p. 71)

The Squire's influence is far-ranging indeed, and the ultimate result of his profligacy and laziness is the breakdown of the social order in Raveloe. Because of his bad management of the land and the way he brings up his sons, he is the last of the Casses to be called Squire.

In fact, the Squire's influence on his sons is the second and perhaps the most important way he affects the community; he has a gentleman's influence though he does not possess the gentleman's virtues. Godfrey and Dunstan Cass are even more deeply influenced by the Squire's example than are the villagers. Their father sets the

example for the laziness and disregard for others that both his sons exhibit. But more importantly, Squire Cass has brought his sons up using the same combination of long periods of laxity followed by moments of extreme severity that he uses in the management of his farms. Godfrey himself is said to have been aware that "his father's indulgence had not been kindness" (p. 124). An example of the Squire's methods occurs when he reacts to the news that Godfrey's horse has been killed while being ridden by Dunstan in a hunt. Although Duncey has had a long history of apparently worse, though unnamed, crimes, the Squire chooses this moment to disown him, telling Godfrey to tell Dunstan that he should not come home again. Godfrey's fear of similar treatment, in turn, makes him avoid telling his father the truth about his own marriage.

Rather than the "wholesome love and fear" that Eliot describes as being provided by the feminine presence, Godfrey feels only fear of his father. Therefore, like Duncey before him, he relies on Chance to get out of his predicament. The narrator remarks that "Favorable Chance is the god of all men who follow their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in" (p. 126). Though Godfrey knows that he is by rights responsible for his wife and child, he does not acknowledge them because he hopes that something will happen that will make acknowledgement

unnecessary. Though he wants to marry Nancy because he believes that, under her influence, he can be a better man, this fact does not mitigate the essential flaws in his nature.

Eliot is quite specific about Godfrey's flaws, saying that

> he had not moral courage enough to contemplate that active renunciation of Nancy as possible for him: he had only conscience and heart enough to make him for ever uneasy under the weakness that forbade the renunciation. (p. 174)

This lack of moral courage takes Godfrey down a path that leads eventually to his actually wishing his wife dead. His only fear when he hears of Molly's collapse outside Silas's cottage is that she might not be dead. But he must have been hoping for such an escape for some time. When Duncey suggests early in the story that Molly might free him by taking too much laudanum, Godfrey does not deny hoping that she might. While he is not overtly evil like Dunstan, or like Dempster in "Janet's Repentance," his lack of moral courage brings evil consequences. Not having had an example of self-sacrificing love before him as a child, he is incapable of renouncing his own desires to the needs of others.

Eliot seems to suggest that Godfrey is in special need of the kind of beneficial influence which is a part of her

feminine ideal. He himself has a "vague longing for some discipline that would have checked his own errant weakness and helped his better will" (p. 124). While Bob, the Squire's third son, is described as a good lad in spite of his father's influence and Dunstan might have turned out badly under any circumstances, Godfrey is described as having "an essentially domestic nature," which has not developed as well as it might, having been "bred up in a home where the hearth had no smiles, and where the daily habits were not chastised by the presence of household order" (p. 81). Even his father calls him "a shilly-shally fellow," saying that he takes after his mother, who "never had a will of her own" (p. 125).

Eliot reminds the reader that it is not just feminine influence but the right kind of feminine influence, the kind that combines "love and fear," that is missing at the Red House. Like Mrs. Dempster in "Janet's Repentance," Godfrey's mother apparently would not have exerted the kind of influence that Aimé-Martin requires of mothers in The Education of Mothers, an influence that he argues would "save and regenerate the world."[11] The Squire tells Godfrey that his wife will need to have a strong will, "for you hardly know your own mind enough to make both your legs walk one way" (p. 125).

But though Godfrey comes under Nancy's better influence, he cannot change what has gone before. Eliot's well-known understanding of the imperfections of her characters is based on her belief that their behavior is in part predetermined by the accidents of their birth. But the inevitability of the Casses' public shame upon the finding of Dunsey's body with the gold beside it and Godfrey's private disappointment at his childlessness are more than simply the poetic justice of a fairy tale. Eliot is suggesting that the Squire and his family have brought their decline upon themselves through their selfishness and irresponsibility.

Though the great age of the Cass family has established its ways as the norm in Raveloe, there is another family in the village which provides a counterpoint to their behavior. The Lammeters have only lived in Raveloe for three generations and have retained the customs they brought with them. In sharp contrast to the Casses, the Lammeters are neither selfish nor irresponsible:

> . . . the Lammeters had been brought up in that way, that they never suffered a pinch of salt to be wasted, and yet everybody in their household had of the best, according to his place. (p. 73)

One cannot imagine old Mr. Lammeter giving bits of beef to his dog in the careless way the Squire did. He and

his daughters are, according to the narrator, both thrifty and charitable. As Leavis says, this is a difficult task, one that the Squire's family does not even attempt.[12] The "multiplication of orts" during the holidays at the Casses occurs not because of their greater charity but because the Squire "has more holes in his pocket than the one where he put his own hand in" (p. 73). The Lammeters are more genuinely generous. But they are generous to the degree that they have decided each of their dependents deserves. That is, they conform to the gentlemanly ideal in the same way that Sir Christopher does in "Mr. Gilfil." Each person in Mr. Lammeter's household is given what Lammeter has determined that he deserves "according to his place."

Mr. Lammeter also differs from the Squire in personal appearance and habits:

> His spare but healthy person, and high-featured firm face, that looked as if it had never been flushed by excess, was in strong contrast, not only with the Squire's, but with the appearance of the Raveloe farmers generally--in accordance with a favorite saying of his own, that "breed was stronger than pasture." (p. 153)

Mr. Lammeter himself distinguishes his ways from those of the Squire by this favorite saying. He is "grave and orderly" while the Squire is florid and hearty. At the Christmas feast, when the Squire hints that Godfrey and Nancy might get married, Lammeter refuses to "bate a jot of

his dignity by seeming elated at the notion of a match between his family and the Squire's" (p. 153). The narrator goes on to say that Lammeter would not give his consent to the match until he had seen an "alteration in several ways" (p. 153), presumably in Godfrey. Among these changes would undoubtedly be a change in Godfrey from an idle fellow to a hard worker.

The Lammeter girls consider it their duty to work hard, both in the house and in the dairy, a fact that shocks the Miss Gunns, guests at the Christmas feast who pretend to great gentility. But Eliot does not consider the faults, such as work-roughened hands and bad grammar, that the Miss Gunns find with Nancy to have any bearing on whether she is a lady, as this passage shows:

> There is hardly a servant-maid in these days who is not better informed than Miss Nancy; yet she had the essential attributes of a Lady--high veracity, delicate honour in her dealings, deference to others, and refined personal habits--and lest these should not suffice to convince grammatical fair ones that her feelings can at all resemble theirs, I will add that she was slightly proud and exacting, and as constant in her affection towards a baseless opinion as towards an erring lover. (p. 148)

Nancy, like her father, is proud, but the Lammeters' pride is quite different from the Casses'. It is based on a certain code of behavior which they believe in strongly and follow closely. Mr. Lammeter is a gentleman, and Nancy

also lives according to a code similar to the gentlemanly code.

But, though the Lammeters are superior to the Casses, the rigidity of their thinking also produces unfortunate consequences, as the inflexibility of the gentleman so often does in Eliot's fiction. Nancy's code covers everything, both serious and trivial, and she never wavers in her adherence to it. She reveals her inflexibility early in the story in the comparatively trivial matter of the dresses that she and Priscilla wear to the dance at the Red House. Nancy insists that Priscilla wear a silver colored dress exactly like hers because she believes that sisters should dress exactly alike. The fact that Priscilla does not look good in the color does not alter Nancy's belief. Priscilla herself says that she habitually gives in to Nancy's "notions" because she knows that there is no way to change her mind. As Priscilla says to Nancy, from the time of their childhood, "If you wanted to go the field's length, the field's length you'd go; and there was no whipping you, for you looked as prim and innocent as a daisy all the while" (p. 150). Nancy is not without concern for others, as an incident in the same scene reveals. When Priscilla, without thinking, asks the Miss Gunns if they mind being ugly, Nancy is concerned for their feelings. But she is unwilling, or one might even say

incapable, of altering her own beliefs to accommodate the needs of others. Whether it be the trivial matter of the dresses or a far more important matter like her opposition to adopting a child, Nancy's code cannot be altered:

> It was as necessary to her mind to have an opinion on all topics, not exclusively masculine, that had come under her notice, as for her to have a precisely marked place for every article of her personal property: and her opinions were always principles to be unwaveringly acted on. They were firm not because of their basis, but because she held them with a tenacity inseparable form her mental action. On all the duties and proprieties of life, from filial behavior to the arrangements of the evening toilet, pretty Nancy Lammeter, by the time she was three-and-twenty, had her unalterable little code. (p. 216)

Nancy does have some very real virtues; for example, her love for her husband and "her sense of responsibility for the effect of her conduct on others" (p. 214) make her question whether she has been understanding enough of Godfrey's deep disappointment at not having any children. But, as Henry Auster says, her good qualities, which are the "standard of excellence in the region," are not "irradiated by any transfiguring impulse."[13] Like the gentleman's virtue's, her virtues are negative ones. In fact, she is very much like Newman's gentleman whose role Newman compares to that of an armchair.[14] She may give slightly when she comes in contact with others, but she never changes her essential shape, her way of thinking. Nancy is

essentially passive; she is not capable of the kind of active self-sacrifice required by Eliot's feminine ideal.

Nancy does not suffer, then, from a lack of moral courage, as Godfrey does; instead, she suffers from the kind of moral blindness that characterizes Sir Christopher in Eliot's earlier story, the moral blindness that all of Eliot's gentlemen exhibit in varying degrees. Because of this, her influence on Godfrey can help him only up to a certain point. She can and does restore order to his life, but she is as guilty of moral blindness as Godfrey is when they go to claim Eppie as his child. Godfrey's selfishness in convincing himself that what he wants is good for Eppie does not surprise the reader. His blindness is at first complete: "It seemed to him that the weaver was very selfish (a judgement readily passed by those who have never tested their own power of sacrifice) to oppose what was undoubtedly for Eppie's welfare" (p. 21). But Nancy's insensitivity is at first more surprising:

> Even Nancy with all the acute sensibility of her own affections, shared her husband's view, that Marner was not justifiable in his wish to retain Eppie, after her real father had avowed himself. She felt that it was a very hard trial for the poor weaver, but her code allowed no question that a father by blood must have a claim above that of any foster-father. (pp. 232-33)

As Eliot describes it, Nancy is guided by her judgment here, as a gentleman would be, not by her feelings. Though she feels that losing Eppie will be hard on Marner, she does not act upon this feeling, as Eliot's feminine ideal would require her to do. Later, when they have gone home, Godfrey admits that Marner was right when he said that when a man turns a blessing away, it falls to somebody else, and he says it "with a keen decisiveness of tone, in contrast with his usually careless and unemphatic speech" (p. 236). But all that Nancy can say in response is to ask if he will make it known that he is Eppie's father. She is concerned, even at this critical moment, with the respectability of the family in the eyes of others.

The importance that Nancy places on respectability makes it unlikely that she would have married Godfrey if she had known about his past, though she says that she does not know what she would have done. She could not possibly have sacrificed that image of herself that she had so carefully constructed. To the end, in spite of her good qualities, Nancy remains limited by the code that she has devised for herself. She never allows herself to be guided by the love that she genuinely feels for others, and so she remains incapable of self-sacrifice.

Eliot does, however, provide an alternative to the ideal of the gentleman as represented by Nancy Lammeter;

Dolly Winthrop is the representative of Eliot's feminine ideal in the novel. Dolly is active rather than passive, self-sacrificing rather than selfish, and sympathetic rather than judgmental. Eliot describes her in this way:

> . . . she was in all respects a woman of scrupulous conscience, so eager for duties that life seemed to offer them too scantily unless she rosé at half-past four, though this threw a scarcity of work over the more advanced hours of the morning. (p. 133)

This passage suggests that Dolly is perhaps over-zealous in her devotion to others, much as Mr. Tryon is in "Janet's Repentance."

But Eliot admires this quality in Dolly, just as she admires Mr. Tryon's egoism. Dolly is the first person who is thought of in the village when someone needs a nurse, and she is one of the first to visit Silas after his gold is stolen. This activity on behalf of others sets Dolly apart from Nancy, whom we see sitting alone and brooding about her refusal to adopt a child on the afternoon when Dunstan's body is discovered. Dolly, on the other hand, in her infrequent idle moments "seek[s] out all the sadder and more serious elements of life, and pasture[s] her mind upon them" (p. 134). She thinks about the fever that

> come and took off them as were full-growed, and left the helpless children; and there's the breaking of limbs; and them as 'ud do right and be sober have to suffer by them as are contrairy. (p. 204)

Nancy is concerned only with herself and with Godfrey, while Dolly is concerned with the world outside herself.

Dolly also fulfills Eliot's feminine ideal by not being so quick to make judgments as those guided by the ideal of the gentleman would be, as Nancy herself is. For example, though Nancy loves Godfrey, she feigns indifference to him at the Squire's Christmas party. Her code will not allow her "to marry a man whose conduct showed him careless of his character" (p. 151), though she knows nothing worse of him than that he has not been attentive to her and has spent what she considers to be too much time at the Rainbow. Nancy's idea of self-sacrifice is to follow her motto of "love once, love always" and never marry, if Godfrey should never reform. On the other hand, Dolly, despite her serious nature, is married to the jovial Ben Winthrop:

> It seemed surprising that Ben Winthrop, who loved his quart-pot and his joke, got along so well with Dolly; but she took her husband's jokes and joviality as patiently as everything else, considering that "men <u>would</u> be so," and viewing the stronger sex in the light of animals whom it had pleased Heaven to make naturally troublesome, like bulls and turkey-cocks. (p. 134)

Dolly doesn't consider her husband's drinking and his jokes as matters that require her approval or disapproval, as Nancy does. She accepts them with the same patience with

which she accepts everything that cannot be changed, and she seems to know the difference between those things that cannot be changed and those that can.

Dolly's good influence on others, the kind of influence required by Eliot's feminine ideal, is far greater than Nancy's influence on anyone, even on her husband. The reader can only guess what sort of influence Dolly has on Ben Winthrop, but her influence on Silas Marner is very clear. It begins when she takes an active interest in his welfare after the theft of his gold; the narrator remarks that she felt "her mind drawn strongly towards Silas Marner, now that he appeared in the light of a sufferer" (p. 134). At first she only helps him by visiting him, supporting him in his desire to keep the child, and advising him about how to care for her.

But eventually she helps integrate him into the community and finally helps him reconcile himself to what happened to him before he came to Raveloe. Leavis argues that Dolly and the people of Raveloe in general "practice the true religion of neighborliness."[15] Once they see that Silas is a fellow-sufferer of the world's ills, they offer him their help. As in "Janet's Repentance," it is suffering that draws people together and makes a beneficial influence, an important part of Eliot's feminine ideal, possible. Dolly takes on suffering for Silas's sake when

he confides in her about his past and she attempts to help him figure out the truth about it. It is she who advises him to go back to Lanthern Yard, and though he gets no answers about why the lots went against him, their inability to understand helps her to formulate what Eliot calls her simple Raveloe theology:

> "It allys comes into my head when I'm sorry fer folks, and feel as I can't do a power to help 'em, not if I was to get up i' the middle o' the night--it comes into my head as Them above has got a deal tenderer heart nor what I've got--for I can't be anyways better nor Them as made me, it's because there's things I don't know on; and for the matter o' that there may be plenty o' things I don't know on, for it's little as I know--that it is." (p. 204)

Dolly is aware of the limitations on her actions and her knowledge, and her answer to the pain and unhappiness that these limitations cause is to believe that the love that she feels for others is a reflection of the love that "Them above" has for man. Because of her own love and sympathy for others, she believes that God is just as tender-hearted; therefore, she argues that He must have some plan which she can't understand but which makes the pain that people must endure necessary. Dolly finds a proof of God's existence in her own tender-hearted nature, an argument which is similar to that in Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity. Feuerbach says that "to suffer for others is divine; he who suffers for others, who lays

down his life for them, acts divinely, is a God to men."[16]

Eliot is suggesting, then, that the self-sacrificing love that Dolly feels for others is holy. Under the influence of Feuerbach, Eliot speaks through Dolly; she uses Feuerbach's thinking to develop her own feminine ideal. When Dolly says, "And all we've got to do is to trusten, Master Marner--to do the right thing as far as we know, and to trusten" (p. 214), Eliot is not talking about trust in God but trust in other human beings. As David Carroll says, "trust in an ordered universe is not the result of an intellectual verification of cause and effect. It is the product of love's mediation."[17]

It is significant, I think, that Silas accepts the ways of Raveloe, both the christening and the inoculation that Dolly advises him to get for Eppie, without ever understanding or believing in any of it any more than he understands the good in smoking a pipe or believes that it is good. But under the influence of Dolly, whom he trusts, Silas simply accepts these things as being good for Eppie, whom he loves. The thing that brings the change in him is Eppie and his love for her:

> "There's good i' this world--I've a feeling o' that now; and it makes a man feel as there's a good more nor he can see, i' spite o' the trouble and the wickedness. That drawing o' the lots is dark; but the child was sent to me: there's dealings with us--there's dealing." (p. 205)

Silas has regained his belief that there is good in the world, that is, in other people, not his old belief in a grim God of judgment.

It was inevitable that Silas's Calvinist beliefs, more rigid even than Nancy Lammeter's gentlemanly code, would disappoint a person as simple as Silas was before the drawing of the lots, but in Silas's new world, there are no absolutes. In fact, by making Dolly, who is perhaps Eliot's best representative of her feminine ideal, refuse to believe in absolutes, Eliot makes the belief that truth is subjective a part of that ideal. And it is this refusal to believe in absolutes that most clearly distinguishes the representatives of Eliot's feminine ideal from her gentleman.

Dolly herself is unwilling to make even her own admonition "to trusten" an absolute command. She says at one point that if Silas had gone on trusting others, he wouldn't have run away from Lanthern Yard and become so alone. But when Silas says that it would have been very hard for him to stay, Dolly says, "'And so it would . . . them things are easier said nor done; and I'm partly ashamed o' talking'" (p. 215). Dolly is, however, only partly ashamed; she does make judgments tempered by mercy that comes from understanding. Eliot's own unwillingness to make harsh judgments is reflected in Dolly, and it is,

in fact, Dolly's love and sympathy that make the change in Silas possible, though the real change takes place gradually, under Eppie's influence.

Actually, Eppie does not change Silas as much as she brings out what is buried within him, another reflection of Eliot's concurrence with Feuerbach's belief in the essential goodness within each human being. The first thing that Silas thinks of when he sees Eppie is his little sister and how he used to help take care of her. Eppie goes on reminding him of the past and his ties with other people:

> As the child's mind was growing into knowledge, his mind was growing into memory as her life unfolded, his soul, long stupefied in a cold narrow prison, was unfolding too, and trembling gradually into full consciousness. (p. 185)

Although Silas has been a miser for fifteen years, his nature has not changed. Eliot makes this clear on two occasions: first, when Silas helps the old woman with dropsy because her symptoms remind him of his own mother's illness, and, second, when he breaks his water pot, yet keeps the pieces in its old place because of his affection for it. Both of these events indicate that his trust in others and his affections are not dead but buried.

Silas is very different from David Faux, a character in Eliot's short story, "Brother Jacob," written at approx-

imately the same time that she was writing Silas Marner.[18] "Brother Jacob" is the story of a man who steals money from his mother, tricks his idiot brother, and lies in an attempt to marry well. David Faux's greed is linked with his desire for preeminence over others, while Silas takes refuge in his gold coins from a world he can't trust. David lies and steals in order to gain money and position, but Silas does honest work for his gold and hurts only himself by his devotion to it. Silas is hiding no irrevocable deed, like David's or Godfrey's. Under Eppie's influence, he emerges from what Eliot refers to in the novel as "the city of destruction" (p. 190). As Leavis points out, Silas's story closely resembles that of Christian in Pilgrim's Progress.[19] He leaves Lanthern Yard with a burden on his back, having lost his faith and makes his way to Raveloe, where he eventually finds his reward, on earth instead of in heaven. The adoption of Eppie provides another purpose for the gold that Silas earns, his greed is destroyed, and the goodness buried within him reappears.

This goodness manifests itself as love and self-sacrifice, the most important elements of Eliot's feminine ideal, and there is no doubt that Eliot sees Silas as a representative of her ideal. He is compared to a woman several times, as when a neighbor remarks that it is

surprising that a man alone would want to take in a child, but goes on to say, "I reckon the weaving makes you handier than men as do out-door work--you're partly as handy as a woman, for weaving comes next to spinning" (p. 189). In addition, Silas has inherited the wisdom of his mother regarding the medicinal power of herbs. The epigraph from "Michael" is also suggestive, for Wordsworth describes Michael as having done his son "female service" while he was "a babe in arms."[20] This is just what Silas does for Eppie, demanding that Dolly allow him to be the one to wash and dress the baby from the very beginning. His relationship to Eppie is like that of

> some man who has a precious plant to which he would give a nurturing home in a new soil, thinks of the rain, and the sunshine, and all influences, in relation to his nursling, and asks industriously for all knowledge that will help him to satisfy the wants of the searching roots, or to guard leaf and bud from invading harm. (p. 190).

Silas's love for Eppie expresses itself in the way he cares for her, but it also expresses itself through self-sacrifice. Eliot uses Silas's attempt to discipline Eppie by putting her in the coal-hole to illustrate his selflessness. Eppie is described as having the natural mischievousness of a toddler, and Dolly advises that the only way to correct it is by punishment. Because he cannot bear to strike her, Silas puts Eppie in the coal-hole one day after

she cuts the cloth tying her to the loom and wanders down to a lake where she might easily have drowned. But Eppie enjoys being in the coal-hole so much that she gets back in when Silas turns his back. Still, Silas cannot bear to discipline her:

> So Eppie was reared without punishment, the burden of her misdeeds being borne vicariously by father Silas. The stone hut was made a soft nest for her, lined with downy patience. (p. 189)

Because he wants to spare Eppie suffering, Silas takes suffering on himself. This is the kind of love and self-sacrifice that Eliot's feminine ideal demands.

Silas's redemption and return to society are brought about not only by the influence of others but by his own actions. He earns his good fortune, just as the Casses brought their bad luck upon themselves. This notion that good luck is earned is implicit in the novel as a whole, as well as being explicitly stated by Dolly when she is speaking to Silas: "I wish you the best o' luck, and it's my belief as it'll come to you, if you do what's right by the orphin child" (p. 183). Silas's experience suggests that one's own well-being as well as the well-being of others depends upon the degree to which the feminine ideal is realized.

But the particular sort of experiences that Silas goes through must be very different from the experiences of a modern reader or even a nineteenth-century reader. In fact, the story's legendary quality comes in part from the fact that Eliot sets it in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries instead of setting it in 1861, the time in which it was written and published. Setting the action in the past gives the story a quality of remoteness which allowed the contemporary reader to accept the remarkable details of Silas's life as he might not have been able to do if it had been set in the reader's present. However, the time difference is not the chief difference between the reader and Silas; the chief difference is a cultural one. Silas as well as the inhabitants of Raveloe are completely without education or understanding of the forces that shape their lives.

But Eliot insists time and again in the course of the novel that there are more similarities than differences between the inhabitants of Raveloe and the reader, as she does here when she compares Silas's estrangement from society with what might happen to a more educated person in similar circumstances:

> Even people whose lives have been made various by learning, sometimes find it hard to keep a fast hold on their habitual views of life, on their faith in the Invisible, nay, on the sense that their past joys

> and sorrows are a real experience, when they are suddenly transported to a new land, where the beings around them know nothing of their history, and share none of their ideas--where their mother earth shows another lap, and human life has other forms than those on which their souls have been nourished. (p. 62)

Eliot describes a state of mind here which is similar to that of the speaker of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" ode in order to argue that the reader is not so very different from Silas despite the vast differences in education and culture. She demands that the reader recognize that Silas's emotions and the mistakes he makes are similar to the ones that she and her contemporaries had felt or made.

Eliot accomplishes her purpose by making Silas's story typical of the sort of experiences that the reader must have had to endure. The new world that Silas finds himself in, which is in fact the world the reader has lost, is far more natural than the world he has left behind, a world in which, as Leavis has shown, his fundamentalist faith has deprived him of his culture and his past, as represented by his mother's medicinal lore.[21] Having already been cut off from his past by his faith, Silas is without a prop when he loses his faith in God and in others. He is also cut off from others by his weaving, as the contrast between "the natural cheerful trotting of the winnowing machine" (p. 52) and the sound of the loom makes clear. The use of the

winnowing machine promotes a sense of community since the workers must follow the machine in a group, while Silas's work must be done alone and makes him more solitary than he already is. The boys in Raveloe are actually afraid of Silas because of the sound of his machine. Silas's weaving cuts him off from the community just as people from the country- side were cut off from their communities by the industrial revolution when they moved into the cities to take jobs in factories.

Silas's predicament is complicated by the fact that his loss of faith makes his work his only reason for being. It isolates him from others. As the narrator says, "Every man's work, pursued steadily, tends in this way to become an end in itself, and so to bridge over the loveless chasms of his life" (p. 64). Silas's situation is not dissimilar to that of more well-educated people of the same period who have suffered a loss of faith and can find nothing with which to replace the old beliefs. One is reminded of the speaker in Matthew Arnold's "The Grande Chartreuse," who declares that he is "wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born."[22] Silas, like many others in the Victorian period, takes refuge in a kind of utilitarianism, though, ironically, his work seems to him not to supply a need but to satisfy the greed of Raveloe housewives. His only value to the community is his useful-

ness in weaving cloth, but his productive labor does not seem to him to have any practical value. To him, the women of Raveloe seem "to be laying up linen for the life to come" (p. 64). Because he has no real contact with the people of the village, he cannot understand why they require so much woven cloth.

As a result, Silas takes refuge in the work itself, and this dependence on his work for its own sake leads eventually to his greed, which cuts him off further from others. Silas comes to love the money itself, though "He had seemed to love it little in the years when every penny had its purpose for him; for he loved the purpose then" (p. 65). Silas has no purpose because he has no real ties to others, and it is the individual's responsibility to and love for others that are at the heart of Eliot's (and Feuerbach's) creed. The crisis of faith and the effects of the industrial revolution which changed the lives of the Victorians are mirrored in Silas's experience before and after he comes to Raveloe.

Eliot does not exclude herself in her comparison of the more educated class with Silas and the people of Raveloe. A remark by the narrator concerning the narrowness of Silas's life of weaving and hoarding makes this clear:

> The same sort of process has perhaps been undergone by wiser men, when they have been cut off from faith and love--only, instead of a loom and a heap of guineas, they have some erudite research, some ingenious project, or some well-knit theory. (pp. 68-9)

Eliot herself spent years in erudite research in her translations of Strauss and Feuerbach as well as her extensive reading. She is perhaps recalling that period of her life in this passage, for these intellectual pursuits cut her off from her family and her past. Lawrence Dessner goes so far as to suggest that passages like this indicate that Eliot had undergone "a crisis of faith in intellectual studies themselves."[23]

But it is more likely, I think, that she is trying in Silas Marner to accomplish her original purpose in writing fiction, the same purpose she had when she wrote "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton." In that story, she admonishes the reader in this way:

> Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and pathos, the tragedy and comedy lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones.[24]

Eliot intends for the sophisticated reader to "gain unspeakably" by the comparison of his own life to Silas Marner's. Not only can the reader learn that less educated people have the same doubts, fears, and temptations as

themselves and that they often respond to them in much the same way. Silas's story also provides the reader with an answer to the dilemma caused by the crisis of faith and the effects of the industrial revolution. That answer is the love of other human beings, which is the basis of Eliot's feminine ideal.

Eliot uses more than the narrator's comments to make a comparison between the educated and uneducated classes; she also develops the comparison dramatically in the scene at the Rainbow in which the villagers have a series of arguments. In an unusually perceptive review of the novel written in April 1861, R. H. Hutton had this to say about that scene:

> The turn given to the conversation of the peasants, though never untrue or unreal in them, has almost always a distinct relation to the intellectual forms of the same questions as discussed in modern times by the educated classes.[25]

David Carroll's excellent analysis of the scene in his essay "Reversing the Oracles of Tradition" concludes that it is "a comprehensive rehearsal for the important themes of the novel."[26] All of the disputants in the Rainbow come up against the difficulty of distinguishing between subjective and objective truth. The arguments are all resolved by the landlord, who attempts to find some middle ground between the disputants. Or, rather, he does not so much

resolve them as try to show that truth is subjective. Both the argument between the butcher and the farrier about the cow and the argument between Mr. Macey and Mr. Tookey about Mr. Tookey's singing are ended by the landlord's comment, "You're both right and you're both wrong, as I say" (p. 99).

During the conversation at the Rainbow, Mr. Macey also introduces the question of legal truth as opposed to the truth of affection, the same question that arises at the end of the novel when Godfrey declares that he is Eppie's father. Macey recounts the story of how the parson had made a mistake when marrying Nancy Lammeter's parents, asking "wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded husband?" and "wilt thou have this man to thy wedded wife?" (p. 101). The parson had resolved Mr. Macey's concerns about whether it is the meaning or the words that make the marriage legal by telling him that the legality is established by the signing of the church register. Mr. Macey was concerned that if the marriage were not legal, the Lammeters would not be happy or prosperous. But the more sophisticated reader is aware that it is what comes after the ceremony that determines whether the marriage is good or not, just as it is Silas's love and care of Eppie that make him her father, instead of Godfrey with his legal claims. It is left to the reader to determine for himself whether the Lammeters' marriage was good; the reader must arrive at his

own subjective truth guided by Eliot.

The most explicit statement of Eliot's belief that the truth is subjective is, again, a statement by the landlord concerning the existence of ghosts. Here, the landlord suggests that absolute standards of judgment are not reliable; he maintains that, instead, one must make judgments by examining the circumstances of each individual case:

> "Ay, but there's this in it, Dowlas," says the landlord, speaking in a tone of much candour and tolerance. "There's folks, i' my opinion, they can't see ghos'es, not if they stood as plain as a pike-staff before 'em. And there's reason i' that. For there's my wife, now, can't smell, not if she'd the strongest o' cheese under her nose. I never see'd a ghost myself; but then I says to myself, 'Very like I haven't got the smell for 'em.' I mean, putting a ghost for a smell, or else contrairiways. And so, I'm for holding with both sides; for, as I say, the truth lies between 'em. And if Dowlas was to go and stand, and say he'd never seen a wink 'o Cliff's Holiday all the night through, I'd back him; and if anybody said as Cliff's Holiday was certain sure for all that, I'd back <u>him</u> too. For the smell's what I go by." (p. 10)

As Knoepflmacher says, Eliot is suggesting that there can be "two irreconcilable yet equally valid opposing realities"; therefore, mystery "survives next to the clarity of reason."[27] The question of whether ghosts really exist cannot be resolved, though each individual can provide an answer that is true for him. In a letter written shortly before she started writing <u>Silas Marner</u>,

Eliot herself says, "But to me the Development theory and all other explanations of processes by which things came to be, produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes."[28]

The only answer to the mystery that lies behind reality is the answer that the villagers give to Silas when he appears at the Rainbow shortly after the landlord makes his remarks and that answer is consistent with Eliot's feminine ideal. The actions of the men in the Rainbow and the conclusions they come to resemble Dolly Winthrop's activity on behalf of Silas and her conclusion that all one can do is "to trusten." The men in the Rainbow help Silas because they realize that he does not have special powers as they had thought; he is a sufferer like themselves. Silas, the villagers, and Eliot's readers as well are all equally unable to penetrate the mystery that lies behind the reality of human suffering just as the villagers are unable absolutely to resolve the question about the existence of ghosts. The only thing they can do is to express their love for and trust in others during times of suffering. Silas Marner is unique in George Eliot's body of work because the form of the novel is more ideally suited to conveying this belief than any of her other fiction. This novel, which, Eliot says, "came across my other plans by a sudden inspiration,"[29] is the perfect vehicle for conveying

her belief in her feminine ideal, and it is this belief that lies at the heart of all her work.

Notes

[1] U. C. Knoepflmacher, George Eliot's Early Novels (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 250.

[2] Gordon Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), III, 382.

[3] Q. D. Leavis, introd., Silas Marner, by George Eliot (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 36.

[4] Jerome Thale, The Novels of George Eliot (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 58-69.

[5] Leavis, introd., Silas Marner, p. 34.

[6] George Eliot, Silas Marner, ed. Q. D. Leavis (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 71. Subsequent references to this novel will be given following the quotation.

[7] Henry Auster, "A Qualified Redemption of Ordinary and Fallible Humanity," in George Eliot: The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner, ed. R. P. Draper (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1977), p. 221.

[8] Shirley Robin Letwin, The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 70.

[9] Leavis, introd., Silas Marner, p. 31.

[10] Leavis, introd., Silas Marner, p. 35.

[11] Louis Aimé-Martin, The Education of Mothers: or the Civilization of Mankind by Women, in Women in the Nineteenth Century, ed. S. Margaret Fuller (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1845), p. 38.

[12] Leavis, notes, Silas Marner, p. 253.

[13] Auster, "A Qualified Redemption of Ordinary and Fallible Humanity," p. 224.

[14] John Henry Cardinal Newman, The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), pp. 208-10.

[15] Leavis, introd., Silas Marner, p. 17.

[16] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 60.

[17] David Carroll, "Reversing the Oracles of Tradition," in George Eliot: The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner, ed. R. P. Draper (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1977), p. 204.

[18] George Eliot, Silas Marner, Scenes from Clerical Life, and Other Stories (New York: A. L. Burt), pp. 1-43.

[19] Leavis, introd., Silas Marner, p. 14.

[20] William Wordsworth, Selected Poems and Prefaces, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 149.

[21] Leavis, introd., Silas Marner, pp. 15-16.

[22] Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas From the Grande Chartreuse," in The Major Victorian Poets: Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, ed. William F. Buckler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), p. 608.

[23] Lawrence Jay Dessner, "The Autobiographical Matrix of Silas Marner," Studies in the Novel, XI, No. 3 (1979), 271.

[24] George Eliot, "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," in Scenes of Clerical Life, ed. David Lodge (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 81.

[25] R. H. Hutton, unsigned review, Economist, in George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, ed. David Carroll (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 176.

[26] Carroll, "Reversing the Oracles of Tradition," p. 208.

[27] Knoepflmacher, George Eliot's Early Novels, p. 250.

[28] Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters, III, 227.

[29] Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters, III, 371.

CHAPTER IV

Romola

It is interesting that Eliot turned from her planning of Romola to write Silas Marner, for the two novels could not be more different. The difference lies not just in the fact that Marner is an English story while Romola is an historical novel set in fifteenth-century Florence. A more important difference is that while Silas Marner was the culmination of Eliot's examination of the way in which her feminine ideal can be realized on a strictly personal level, Romola is the first of Eliot's novels to explore the limits of an individual's ability to exert on a society as a whole the kind of influence required by her ideal. Eliot explores these limits in the character of the monk, Savonarola, who attempts to use his own personal influence to reform Florentine society according to Christian principles. Although he is successful in influencing individuals such as Romola, who comes to represent Eliot's feminine ideal in the novel, he does not succeed in influencing men like Bernardo del Nero, who is the chief representative of the ideal of the gentleman. Savonarola's failure to influence men like Bernardo is not due solely to their inflexibility of thinking, which Eliot associates with the

gentleman; in his zeal to achieve reform, Savonarola becomes guilty of the same sort of inflexibility.

The fact that Eliot has the same concerns in Romola that she had in her earlier work is borne out by her choice of fifteenth-century Florence as the setting of her novel because she perceived its similarity to nineteenth-century England. The forces that influence the lives of the people in Eliot's Florence are remarkably similar to the forces that shaped her own time. This similarity has not been overlooked by critics of Romola, beginning with R. H. Hutton's review in the Spectator in 1863. Always a perceptive critic of Eliot's work, Hutton saw that the

> great artistic purpose of the story is to trace out the conflict between liberal culture and the more passionate form of the Christian faith in that strange era, which has so many points of resemblance with the present.[1]

More recent critics, including Felicia Bonaparte, have identified Romola as a "thoroughly contemporary figure, the Victorian intellectual struggling to resolve the dilemmas of the modern age."[2] The solution that Romola finds in the life one sees her living in the epilogue combines the rationalism of her father with the Christian principles of Savonarola. The fact that Savonarola himself is not able to come to such a reconciliation reveals Eliot's dislike for the narrowness of his Christian dogmatism as well as

her lack of faith in the strictly political solution that he comes to believe in. In the epilogue, therefore, we see Romola attempting to influence only those whom she has adopted as her family; this sort of limited action is, Eliot believes, ultimately more successful, both personally and socially, than Savonarola's attempts to reform an entire society. In Romola, Eliot seems to conclude that her feminine ideal of self-sacrifice and the beneficial influence it produces can affect society as a whole only indirectly.

The character Romola, not surprisingly, becomes another of the ideal figures that appear so often in Eliot's fiction. Eliot makes Romola, to a certain extent, a positivist heroine who, as J. B. Bullen has shown, moves through the three stages of history that Comte identified: the polytheistic, the monotheistic, and the positivist.[3] Romola is in the polytheistic stage of history at the beginning of the novel when she is devoting herself to her father's study of the Greek and Roman classics. Later, when she comes under Savonarola's influence and becomes a Christian, she moves into the monotheistic stage. And, finally, she moves into the positivist stage when she comes to rely on her own perceptions to interpret reality instead of relying absolutely on Savonarola's teaching. Although Eliot does not accept the dogmatic Comtean system, which

includes such doctrines as a prohibition on divorce and the belief that a widow should not remarry, she does accept Comte's positivist stages of history, as Romola's personal history reveals. Furthermore, Comte's belief that "Woman is the spontaneous priestess of Humanity" and that it is her role to be an influence for good in the lives of her husband and children, and in society as a whole, is similar to Eliot's feminine ideal.[4] Eliot does not agree with Comte that the moral values of her ideal are to be found only in women, but she does make Romola the repository of those values in the novel.

Unfortunately, Eliot's conception of Romola as an ideal figure produced the same sort of conflict between her efforts to write a realistic story and her desire to present her ethical theories that occurred in some of her earlier work, such as "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton." Eliot herself realized this problem, as her response to a letter from Sara Sophia Hennel shows: "You are right in saying that Romola is ideal--I feel it acutely in the reproof my own soul is constantly getting from the image it has. My own books scourge me."[5] As critics have pointed out from the first, Romola is not only too good; she is, as Jerome Thale says, seen "only in terms of large qualities--Renaissance paganism, humility, or self-sacrifice."[6] In the creation of Romola, Eliot may have

been influenced by Comte's belief that what he called the "soul of humanity" could best be represented in art by a woman.

Eliot sacrifices realism in the novel to her desire to make Romola a more perfect representative of her feminine ideal. One need only read the opening chapters of Middlemarch to understand the error that Eliot made in developing her character. Nowhere is Romola treated with the same irony with which Eliot treats Dorothea; the reader is never invited to laugh at Romola's mistakes. For example, when Romola renounces the wearing of jewelry and other ornaments under the influence of Savonarola, this renunciation is treated very differently from Dorothea's similar renunciation in Middlemarch. The vanity that lies behind Dorothea's action is revealed in the scene in which she and Celia divide their mother's jewels, while Romola's renunciation of ornament seems to be motivated by pure self-sacrifice unadulterated by vanity of any sort. Ironically, this problem is compounded by the methods Eliot uses to makes her story realistic. The air of unreality given to the novel by the preponderance of historical details about Florentine life has been much discussed, and the discussion need not be reiterated here.[7] But the combination of the ideal figure of Romola with the overabundance of detail might make the novel unreadable (as some critics have

suggested it is) were it not for the presence of other more well-developed characters.

Romola's effort to reconcile the claims of her upbringing as a pagan rationalist with her belief in the Christian principles advocated by Savonarola is not the only point of comparison between the world of the novel and the Victorian world. Many of the main characters in Romola seem, as Andrew Sanders has pointed out, more like Englishmen than Renaissance Florentines.[8] For example, Eliot gives Bernardo del Nero, Romola's godfather, qualities that she usually associates with the English gentleman. Bernardo comes closer than any other character in Romola to playing the kind of role Sir Christopher Cheverel plays in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story." He takes the same sort of interest in and responsibility for his land, and undoubtedly for the people on it, as Sir Christopher does. He is described at one point when he is away from Florence as being engaged in "his favorite occupation of attending to his land."[9]

Bernardo's sense of responsibility extends also into the political realm. Though he prefers his role as a farmer, he assumes a share of responsibility for the governing of Florence. Even though there is great danger in being a Medicean during the time of Savonarola's ascendancy in Florence, Bernardo remains active in politics and

is elected one of the Ten. But the most important quality that Bernardo shares with the English gentleman is the quality of disinterestedness. Though he disagrees with Romola's father, Bardo, about disowning his son and about his desire to keep his library under his own name, Bernardo supports his friend in all his wishes, using his money and influence to help him keep the library together.

It is this quality of disinterestedness, a quality which Eliot associates with the gentleman, that Romola so admires in him when she says, "That seems to me very great and noble--that power of respecting a feeling which he does not share or understand" (p. 239). Bernardo believes that Bardo's exclusive devotion to scholarship has made him too narrow and unyielding, as he had been when he insisted that his son devote himself to his studies as unflaggingly as Bardo himself had always done. They both believe in a devotion to duty, but they disagree about what that duty is. Bernardo's notion of duty is far broader than Bardo's. It includes a conviction that he has responsibilities in the social and political world, while Bardo believes that one's only duty is to his family and friends, even when circum- stances would permit wider interests.

Though Bernardo and Bardo do not agree about the extent of their duty, they both derive their beliefs about duty and other social, political, and philosophical matters

from the same source: the classics. Both of them are stoics to whom virtue and duty are paramount, though Bardo has far more faith in absolute judgment and justice than Bernardo. But Bernardo is as much a stoic as Bardo is, as his acceptance of his death indicates, and their shared belief in the Latin and Greek classics as the source of all knowledge and wisdom is the thing that makes Bernardo loyal to Bardo, despite their disagreements. This classical bias also links Bardo and Bernardo with the English gentleman, whose public school education in the nineteenth century was more than likely to be almost exclusively a classical one. As J. R. de S. Honey says, "the position of the classics, in public schools and in English education in general was if anything more powerful at the end of the nineteenth century than it had been at the beginning."[10]

Although this kind of classical education was the source, according to Robin Gilmour, of the English gentleman's disinterestedness,[11] which is Bernardo's most admirable quality, the way that Eliot characterizes Bardo reveals that there are dangers in concentrating on the classics to the exclusion of everything else. Bardo has very little to do with the world outside his books, as this remark makes clear:

> "For me, Romola, even when I could see, it was with the great dead that I lived; while the living often

> seemed to me mere spectres--shadows dispossessed of true feeling and intelligence." (p. 96)

Bardo's "disinterestedness" has become a withdrawal from the world and disavowal of personal responsibility for anything other than his own scholarship. His physical blindness is a metaphor for his intellectual blindness to everything but the classics of Greek and Rome. It is ironic that Bardo compares himself at one point to Tiresias, for the curse that made Tiresias blind also granted him the gift of prophecy. But Bardo cannot see the future. In fact, his devotion to his work makes him accept Tito as Romola's husband without inquiring into his motives.

Furthermore, in spite of his withdrawal and the stoical scorn he feels for the worldly fame given to those less worthy than himself, he longs to establish a library under his own name. The narrator remarks that "behind the high curtain of his blindness he saw some imaginary high tribunal to which he was appealing against the injustice of Fame" (p. 102). Bardo's devotion to the classics and his demand that his children should also feel the same devotion is really a type of selfishness, which is a quality that Eliot associates with most of the gentlemen in her novels. Behind everything is the desire to think well of himself, not the desire to help others. His judgment makes his son's compliance with his demand that he work with him

absolutely necessary and Dino's failure to comply makes Bardo's judgment of him justified according to his thinking.

Bernardo exhibits the same sort of single-minded devotion to the Medicean party that Bardo exhibits with regard to his scholarly work, but the fact that his energies are engaged in the political sphere gives a new dimension to Eliot's analysis of the gentlemanly ideal. Bernardo is as limited in his way as Bardo is in his. When Lorenzo de Medici dies, the two discuss the fact that there is likely to be strife between parties as a result. Bernardo declares that he will remain loyal to the Mediceans because he does not believe that any other party would be better:

> "If we could have a new order of things that was something else than knocking down one coat of arms to put up another, . . . I should be ready to say, 'I belong to no party: I am a Florentine.'" (p. 121)

Bernardo does not choose his party according to how closely he agrees with the principles it espouses; instead, he maintains that siding with a particular party means "To wish ill or well, for the sake of past wrongs or kindnesses" (p. 121). Therefore, when the other members of the government commission known as the Ten, which is composed entirely of Mediceans, decide to employ Tito to advance their plot against Savonarola, Bernardo must go along since

his loyalties are to those who have done him kindnesses in the past. Though he distrusts Tito both personally and politically, he does not speak out against him because he believes that "he who will be captain of none but honest men will have small hire to pay" (p. 467). Bernardo is compelled to admire Tito's skill in diplomatic work, and so he adopts a sort of utilitarian attitude to him and learns to ignore his doubts.

In short, Bernardo, like the political world of which he is a part, allows the dictates of his reason rather than the promptings of his heart to determine his actions, and this quality makes him similar to the gentleman in Eliot's novels. In the accepted wisdom, it is necessary to employ dishonest political agents; therefore, it is reasonable in Bernardo to go along with the plot. This is the same sort of adherence to an accepted set of principles that Eliot's English gentleman is often guilty of, and it leads to the same sort of misguided judgments, as this remark by the narrator makes clear:

> The principle of duplicity admitted by the Mediceans on their own behalf deprived them of any standard by which they could measure the trustworthiness of a colleague who had not, like themselves, hereditary interests, alliances, and prejudices, which were intensely Medicean. (p. 556)

Bernardo and the other Mediceans cannot imagine the motives of anyone who is not exactly like themselves. Their absolute belief in the "principle of duplicity" blinds them to the true motives of others, just as Sir Christopher's absolute belief in his own principles blinds him to the truth about members of his family.

Though the principle upon which the Mediceans base their actions is not identical with the principles upon which an English gentleman like Sir Christopher in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" bases his, the effect of a too-close adherence to those principles without considering individual cases is the same. But while Sir Christopher's judgments about his family and the people on his estate affect a limited number of people, Bernardo's judgments, and those of the Mediceans, affect the entire society. In Romola, then, Eliot is examining the political effects of purely rational thinking uninformed by feeling, and she concludes that the consequences of such rationality are just as disastrous politically as they are socially.

An examination of Bernardo's view of Romola clearly reveals that he also evaluates more personal matters according to a set of principles from which he does not waver and that his dogmatic judgment often prevents him from acting to change things for the better. Though he loves Romola, his judgment prevents him from doing all that

he might to help her. Bernardo is aware that Bardo has tried to keep Romola "aloof from the debasing influence of [her] own sex" (p. 100), allowing her to know only her foolish cousin Brigida whom he intends to act as a "scarecrow and a warning" (p. 100). Because his son had refused to help him in his work Bardo has taught Romola and prepared her for a life as a scholar, even though he believes that

> the sustained zeal and unconquerable patience demanded from those who would tread the unbeaten paths of knowledge are still less reconcilable with the wandering, vagrant propensity of the feminine mind than the powers of the feminine body. (p. 97)

Bardo attributes any wavering of Romola's attention from their work to feminine weakness instead of attempting to understand her as an individual, and Bernardo has the same prejudice.

Bernardo, like Bardo, and like Sir Christopher Cheverel, evaluates all women according to his own set of preconceived notions. When Romola becomes a disciple of Savonarola, Bernardo attributes it to her unhappiness in her marriage, saying, "It is as I always said--the cramming with Latin and Greek has left her as much a woman as if she had done nothing all day but prick her fingers with the needle" (p. 466). Bernardo believes that Romola's marriage to the duplicitous Tito is the inevitable result of her

highly emotional woman's nature. Therefore, he never explicitly warns her against the marriage, though he is the only person, with the exception of her brother, Dino, who might have been able to persuade her that Tito was not what he seemed. Instead, he merely attempts to delay the marriage, hoping that something will happen to prevent it. Like Newman's gentleman, he refrains from acting. Not only does he refrain from attempting to influence Romola about Tito; he also refrains from criticizing Tito to others, allowing them to think that "any service done to Romola's husband" is "an acceptable homage to her godfather" (p. 467). Put simply, Bernardo carries the quality of disinterestedness too far. He allows it to prevent him from acting on occasions when his influence might have prevented a great deal of suffering, as when Romola marries Tito.

Tito's history after he arrives in Florence demonstrates the even greater danger of a reliance on reason in the absence of a belief in virtue and duty such as Bernardo's and Bardo's. If the two older men represent the gentleman in Romola, Tito reveals the way in which the gentlemanly ideal can be perverted. Tito, like Bernardo, is a rational man, but, unlike Bernardo, he uses reason to avoid making judgments rather than to facilitate making them, and Florentine society allows this tendency, which he

already possesses upon his arrival, to develop to the fullest. In Florence, Tito steps into a society where falsehood is the norm, and he is able to use his knowledge of Latin and Greek as well as his talent for dissembling to rise socially. When he awakes after being shipwrecked, one of the first people he meets is Nello, the barber, who proceeds to explain the Florentine attitude about lying:

> . . . we Florentines have liberal ideas about speech, and consider that an instrument which can flatter and promise so well as the tongue, must have been partly made for those purposes; and that truth is a riddle for eyes and wit to discover, which it were a mere spoiling of sport for the tongue to betray. (p. 82)

Nello typifies the Florentine belief that cleverness is best expressed by the ability to deceive others. Nello's own cleverness lies in the fact that he is able to make his barber shop the meeting place for men of all parties because he never commits himself to any of them: "Heaven forbid that I should fetter my impartiality by entertaining an opinion" (p. 82). Like the landlord in Silas Marner, Nello agrees with everyone in order to make his business pay.

But one cannot imagine Nello being motivated by fellow-feeling, the kind of feeling which motivates Eliot's feminine ideal. It is not likely that he would help someone the way the landlord helps Silas when he comes to

the pub after his money is stolen; he and the other men help Silas because they recognize him as a fellow sufferer. Both Nello and Bratti, the trader, only help Tito because they believe there is something for them to gain by doing so. Nello is a complete skeptic, and he introduces Tito, another skeptic, into a society in which skepticism rightly employed can bring about success. Tito with ease becomes a member of the Neoplatonic society, a group of Mediceans which meets in the Rucellai Gardens in chapter thirty-nine. Like them, he believes that "A wise dissimulation . . . is the only course for moderate rational men in times of violent party feeling" (p. 415).

As Bonaparte points out, Eliot suggests the decline of Platonic rationalism represented by this group, indeed, by Florentine society as a whole, by first referring to members of the Neoplatonic society at the beginning of the fifteenth century who differ sharply from the Mediceans, both morally and intellectually.[12] For example, the Mediceans are very different from Leon Battista Alberti, whom Eliot describes as "a robust universal mind, at once practical and theoretic, artist, man of science, inventor, poet" (p. 410). Alberti, whom Eliot seems to think of as a true "Renaissance man," is very different from men like Bartolommeo Scala, who is described in chapter seven as being engaged in a "learned squabble" with Politian. While

Alberti is an artist, a scientist, an inventor, and a poet, Scala and Politian are squabbling about such trivial matters as the Latin gender of an insect. Furthermore, Scala is only interested in his reputation as a Latin scholar because a good reputation has helped advance his political career.

In Eliot's late fifteenth-century Florence, rationalism has become a tool used by unscrupulous men, like most of the members of the Neoplatonic society, to advance their own interests. The behavior of these men not only fails to conform to Eliot's feminine ideal; it also rejects the gentlemanly ideal, which requires disinterested behavior. It is no wonder, then, that Tito comes to regard his activities in Florence as "a game in which there was an agreeable mingling of skill and chance" (p. 383). One is reminded of the way that Dunstan Cass relies on chance to extricate himself from scrapes that his own actions have caused. As an outsider Tito is able to use his ability to deceive to convince the members of each faction that he is working for them, though he actually believes in none of the parties.

In fact, Tito uses reason in order to convince himself that he believes in nothing; as K. M. Newton points out, he is a nihilist who believes that he has no obligations to anyone.[13] In effect, he cuts himself off totally from

others, as his rationalization about his failure to seek his adopted father, Baldassare, reveals. He tells himself that the human feelings that would prompt him to try to rescue Baldassare are a mere "sentiment of society" (p. 168) and that he is far "too cultured and skeptical" (p. 169) to follow such promptings. The only principle in which Tito believes is hedonism, as this passage indicates:

> What, looked at closely, was the end of all life, but to extract the utmost sum of pleasure? And was not his own blooming life a promise of incomparably more pleasure, not for himself only, but for others, than the wintry life of a man who was past the time of keen enjoyment, and whose ideas had stiffened into barren rigidity? Those ideas had all been sown in the fresh soil of Tito's mind, and were lively germs there. (p. 167)

As Bonaparte has shown, Tito is associated not only here but throughout the novel with Bacchus, the god of pleasure--most obviously when he commissions Piero de Cosimo to paint him as Bacchus and Romola as Ariadne.[14]

But there is more going on in this passage than just Tito's expression of his devotion to pleasure. His classical education, which has produced an "erudite familiarity with disputes concerning the Chief Good" (p. 169) makes it possible for him to use the sophistical argument that he will be able to make far more people happy than Baldassare ever could. He even suggests that Baldassare is partially responsible for his failure to rescue him, as it had been

Baldassare who had taught him that pleasure was the chief good. Tito argues that Baldassare had, in fact, planted a heartless hedonism "in the fresh soil of Tito's mind." He goes on later to argue that since Baldassare had only adopted him to give himself pleasure, he need feel no obligation to him. Thus, Tito uses these two arguments to convince himself that what is easiest for him is for the best: the argument that he is simply practicing the precepts that Baldassare taught him, and the argument that Baldassare is not worthy of rescue.

While Tito uses these arguments which imply standards of value, at the same time he rejects all standards:

> Any maxims that required a man to fling away the good that was needed to make existence sweet, were only the lining of human selfishness turned outward: they were made by men who wanted others to sacrifice themselves for their sake. (p. 168)

Tito is arguing against the kind of self-sacrifice that is required by Eliot's feminine ideal. These contradictory arguments would convince no one but himself; therefore, they serve to isolate him from others, as when Romola begs him to tell her everything about Baldassare. Unwilling to tell her the truth, he attempts to reduce her to passiveness, allowing "all the masculine predominance that was latent within him to show itself" (p. 356). He must refuse to reveal anything about himself because he fears her

judgment of him and so he cuts himself off completely from Romola and from everyone except Tessa, who is incapable of judgment.

It is, then, this isolation from others that dehumanizes Tito, not the fact that he does not believe in any ethical system. As Newton says, Eliot cannot "accuse him of offending against moral absolutes" since she herself does not believe in moral absolutes.[15] Her criticism of the gentlemanly ideal, after all, is that it tends to rely on absolute standards of value. Tito is not wrong to believe that there are no moral standards by which each individual case can be judged; he is wrong to ignore the feelings that should make him want to rescue Baldassare. And he does ignore these feelings in favor of his rationalizations, as when he tells himself that

> He would rather that Baldassare should not suffer: he liked no one to suffer; but could any philosophy prove to him that he was bound to care for another's suffering more than for his own? (p. 168)

In contrast to the thoroughly wicked Dolfo Spini, who seems to enjoy the suffering of others, Tito would prefer to prevent suffering if he can do so with no discomfort to himself. His relationship with Tessa is a case in point. He becomes so deeply involved with her not just for selfish reasons but because she is unhappy living with her step-

father, and he does not like to see her suffer:

> It was true that the kindness was manifested towards a pretty trusting thing whom it was impossible to be near without feeling inclined to caress and pet her; but it was not less true that Tito had movements of kindness to her apart from any contemplated gain to himself. (p. 369)

Even after he denies Baldassare and fears that he is going to disclose the truth about him, he "feels no active malignity, and he would still have been glad not to give pain to any mortal" (p. 288). Similarly, he feels sorry to have deceived Tessa about their mock marriage ceremony, but he does not undeceive her. Tito is not actively evil; like so many of Eliot's gentlemen, he simply does not allow his feelings for others to translate themselves into moral action.

If Tito is unlike the actively evil Dolfo Spini, he is quite similar to Machiavelli, another of the minor characters in Romola, and Eliot uses this similarity to suggest the way in which Tito's character is gradually determined by the choices he makes. In the novel, Tito has the job of secretary to the Signoria until his death in 1498, the same job which Machiavelli actually held from 1498 until the Florentine Republic fell in 1512.[16] Eliot obviously intends for the reader to compare the two men. Machiavelli frequently expresses his admiration for Tito's cleverness

and his envy of him for having gotten a job that he, Machiavelli, considers himself exactly suited for. Machiavelli's analysis of political events in the novel is similar to his political analyses in The Prince and other writings. All of these have a logical basis and avoid sentimentality completely, as when he expresses his opinion in the novel that Savonarola has made a blunder in allowing Bernardo and the others to be executed:

> "Only if a man incurs odium by sanctioning a severity that is not thorough enough to be final, he commits a blunder. And something like that blunder, I suspect, the Frate has committed. It was an occasion on which he might have won some lustre by exerting himself to support the Appeal; instead of that, he has lost lustre, and has gained no strength." (p. 582)

Machiavelli evaluates Savonarola's action solely in terms of its effects, not according to whether it is right or wrong. He argues that Savonarola might have advanced his cause either by killing all those who opposed him or by supporting the appeal for those who were condemned, making no moral distinction between the two alternatives. In effect, Machiavelli perverts the gentlemanly ideal which includes the quality of disinterestedness by excluding moral values from his disinterested analysis of Savonarola's actions. Like Machiavelli's, Tito's actions are also determined by his analysis of their effects; he means to do only those things which he believes will

benefit himself. He, too, attempts to be strictly logical and completely unsentimental.

Nevertheless, when Tito is suddenly confronted by Baldassare on the steps of the Duomo, he does not behave logically. Though it would have been much wiser to have acknowledged Baldassare and pretended to be surprised that he was alive and a prisoner, Tito does not pause to think but effectively denies knowing him when he refers to him as a madman. Eliot accounts for Tito's behavior by saying that

> Tito was experiencing that inexorable law of human souls, that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil which gradually determines character. (p. 127)

Eliot is reversing the dramatic theory that character determines action by maintaining that actions determine character. Because it has become habitual with Tito to deny Baldassare, he denies him again at this critical moment. All his natural human feelings have been destroyed, the kind of feelings that motivate Eliot's feminine ideal and that would have prompted him to acknowledge Baldassare. Therefore, Tito reacts in the only way that he can.

The character in the novel who provides the most obvious contrast with Tito is, of course, Savonarola, the

individual who guides Romola in the second stage of her development. Savonarola introduces Romola to the qualities that Eliot associates with her feminine ideal: self-sacrifice and the ability to influence others for good. It is through Savonarola that Romola learns to avoid making the kind of choices that Tito makes, the selfish choices that eventually determine his character. When Romola meets Savonarola on the road as she is leaving Tito and Florence forever, she is, as George Levine has shown, about to make the same sort of mistake that Tito himself has made.[17] She has taken off the ring that is the symbol of her bond with Tito, just as Tito himself sold the ring that linked him with Baldassare. Her reason for leaving Tito is the same as one of the reasons Tito gave for not seeking Baldassare: She believes that Tito is not worthy of her love. She is rationalizing, that is, using reason for her own purposes, just as Tito does. But Savonarola asks, "can man or woman choose duties? No more than they can choose their birth-place or their father and mother" (p. 430). Just as Tito has failed to fulfil his commitment to Bardo about the library, Romola is now in danger of failing to fulfil her commitment to Tito.

Savonarola also reminds her of her bond with Florence itself, a bond she has not acknowledged before. He tells her that it is her duty to "live for Florence," to work

with him to help its people. He associates her selfish desire to flee with her pagan past in which she "lived with those who sit on a hill aloof, and look down upon their fellow men," concerning themselves only with the dead past "while they scorn God's work in the present" (p. 431).

In contrast to the pagans, Savonarola approaches Romola with "a gaze in which simple human fellowship expressed itself as a strongly felt bond" (p. 429). Savonarola says that he derives the kind of sympathy he feels for others from Christianity, but, as Levine says, Romola responds "only to the direct voice of human feeling which makes her aware that Savonarola is greater than she and can, therefore, be taken as a guide."[18] She is influenced by the feelings in him that prompt him to develop the political theories that would restore the Republic, convictions whose origin he attributes to Christianity. The change that occurs in Romola as a result of her meeting with Savonarola is consistent with Eliot's feminine ideal. Romola responds to Savonarola's influence by returning to Florence and assuming the social and personal responsibilities that Savonarola has convinced her she must. On this strictly personal level, Savonarola is highly successful in using his influence for good, but his success has nothing to do with Christianity. Romola is actually responding to his personal magnetism.

Savonarola is able to influence Romola because his beliefs are unlike the beliefs that she usually associates with Christianity. She had been accustomed to think of Christianity as her father had. Bardo called it a "dim mysticism which eludes all rules of human duty as it eludes all argument" (p. 180), and Bardo's opinion is confirmed when Romola visits her brother Dino at San Marco as he is dying. Dino has returned to Florence "not to renew the bonds of earthly affection" (p. 213), but to report a vision that he has had about Romola. His vision concerns Romola's marriage, which he describes as a temptation by the enemy, and he predicts that it will destroy her father and his library and leave her totally alone. But Romola does not respond to Dino's warning as he had hoped, asking, "What is this religion of yours, that places visions before natural duties?" (p. 211). If Dino had acted more naturally, he would have questioned Romola about her life and would undoubtedly have learned that she was going to marry Tito. Since Dino was the same Fra Luca who had brought Tito a message from Baldassare, Dino could have been the means by which Romola learned the truth about Tito before she married him. Instead, as the narrator says,

> The pre-vision that Fra Luca's words had imparted to Romola had been such as comes from the shadowy region where human souls seek wisdom apart from the human sympathies which are the very life and substance of our wisdom. (p. 218)

Dino's failure to avert the disaster he foresaw is the result of his religious fanaticism, which cuts him off from natural human sympathies. This episode reveals Eliot's concurrence with the Feuerbachian argument that "if we do not sacrifice God to love, we sacrifice love to God, and in spite of the predicate of love, we have the God--the evil being--of religious fanaticism."[19] Dino's original reason for becoming a Christian in defiance of his father was his sympathy for the suffering of others, but, ironically, the mysticism that accompanies his Christian belief in love destroys that sympathy. Dino relies solely on God's love as expressed in his visions, and this reliance has destroyed his own love for Romola, love which might have prevented much suffering. Christianity, as practiced by Dino, leads to the same inability to respond to individuals according to their separate needs that limits the pagans, Bardo and Bernardo. Dino is guilty of the same kind of moral rigidity of which Eliot's gentleman is so often guilty.

When Romola first meets Savonarola, his actions seem to be very different from Dino's; they seem at first to be absolutely consistent with Eliot's feminine ideal. He influences Romola because he takes into account the details of her life and because she senses his genuine sympathy for her, and it is this same sympathy that inspires his

attempts to wipe out the corruption in the church and the state and to restore the Republic. But he comes to think of these attempts to effect change in the political world as "a mission like that of the Hebrew prophets," and he believes "that the Florentines amongst whom his message was delivered were in some sense a second chosen people" (p. 270). Savonarola, like Dino, relies on visions to accomplish his purpose. Because he believes that the world is ordered according to the divine will, his visions must explain the political events which occur in Florence in terms of that will. Therefore, when the French king marches into Italy with his army, Savonarola prophesies that the

> French army was that new deluge which was to purify the earth from iniquity, the French king, Charles VIII was the instrument elected by God, as Cyrus had been of old, and all men who desired good rather than evil were to rejoice in his coming. (p. 273)

Savonarola conveniently ignores the fact that Charles VIII has neither the inclination nor the capacity to perform the role that Savonarola has set for him. More importantly, he comes to see all those people who do not agree with him as allied against him and begins to feel that they must be punished.

Savonarola's fanaticism expresses itself as a distrust of everyone who does not agree with him, and this fanati-

cism is manifested not only in political matters but in personal ones as well. For example, in his desire to help the poor, he speaks out not only against the corruption of the church and its leaders but against spending money on ornaments for the church as well as for individuals. Eventually, such ornaments come to be regarded by Savonarola and his followers as anathema, and they are forcibly taken away from women like Brigida and Tessa to be burned in a huge bonfire. Furthermore, the bands of adolescent boys who take the ornaments are not motivated by a desire for the kind of purity that Savonarola is striving for. If they had not belonged to Savonarola's religious group, Eliot suggests that they would have expended their energy in other forms of hooliganism. The effect that Savonarola originally intended to produce by inveighing against jewelry and ornaments is not the effect attained.

In the same way, the sermons that Savonarola preaches in the Duomo produce a very different feeling in some people than they are intended to produce. Baldassare is inspired to seek vengeance against Tito after listening to one of Savonarola's sermons. Savonarola has, as the narrator says,

> a mind possessed by a never-silent hunger after purity and simplicity, yet caught in a tangle of egoistic demands, false ideas, and difficult outward conditions, that made simplicity impossible. (p. 576)

These "egoistic demands, false ideas, and difficult outward conditions" eventually bring Savonarola to the conclusion that his cause is God's cause; in fact, he comes to identify himself with God, as when he defends his condemnation of Bernardo to Romola by saying, "The cause of my party is the cause of God's kingdom" (p. 578).

When confronted by Romola, Savonarola, as Barbara Hardy points out, becomes very much like Tito.[20] Like Tito, he has used specious reasoning to arrive at the conclusion that it is for the good of the state that Bernardo and the other Mediceans should die, all the time ignoring the fact that he is going against his own original purposes by declining to invoke the appeal. Savonarola himself had "laboured to have it passed so that no Florentine should be subject to loss of life and goods through the private hatred of a few who might happen to be in power" (p. 573). Now that he himself is in power, he sets aside this belief in favor of the argument that

> "the cause of God's kingdom upon earth, is often most injured by the enemies who carry within them the power of certain human virtues. The wickedest man is often not the most insurmountable to the triumph of good." (p. 577)

Though Savonarola intends that this argument should explain to Romola why Bernardo, who is more virtuous than the other Mediceans, should have to die, it actually does

more to explain Savonarola's own failure. His refusal to allow the appeal brings about his own downfall and ultimately places the Republic in the hands of men like Machiavelli, whom the reader knows to have taken over Tito's secretaryship. Because Savonarola cuts himself off from the sympathy he had felt for the individual, a sympathy which had originally motivated his political actions, Eliot suggests that he is in part responsible for the ultimate failure of the Republic. According to Eliot, a beneficial influence like that required by her ideal is possible only if one is motivated by the kind of sympathy for individuals that Silas has lost.

In spite of Savonarola's failure in the political sphere, however, his personal influence on Romola helps to make her far more successful than he in resolving a similar problem. Eliot acknowledges the similarity between the conflict that is going on within Savonarola between his desire to achieve political reform and his desire to remain loyal to his Christian principles, and the conflict within Romola between her loyalty to Savonarola's political theories and her loyalty to Bernardo. In a letter to E. H. Hutton, Eliot responds without surprise to Hutton's dissatisfaction with the character of Romola but says,

> I am sorry she has attracted you so little; for the great problem of her life, which essentially

> coincides with a chief problem in Savonarola's, is one that readers need helping to understand.[21]

In the novel, Eliot refers to this problem as the "question where the duty of obedience ends and duty of resistance begins" (p. 540).

Eliot's interest in this particular dilemma is also apparent in a brief review she wrote for the Leader in 1856. The review, "The Antigone and its Moral," defends Sophocles' Antigone from Matthew Arnold's argument that the play is not likely to interest the nineteenth-century reader because of its remoteness from his experience.[22] Eliot argues that what she calls an antagonism between valid claims occurs between Creon and Antigone and that this antagonism is likely to occur in everyone's life. The conflict in the play is, of course, between Creon's belief in public order and Antigone's belief that her brother has the right to be buried. Romola is struggling with such an "antagonism" when she responds to Savonarola's declaration that his party's cause and God's are one and the same:

> "I do not believe it!" said Romola, her whole frame shaken with passionate repugnance. "God's kingdom is something wider--else, let me stand outside it with the beings that I love." (p. 578)

In spite of her personal admiration for Savonarola, Romola's feelings for Bernardo impel her to reject the

argument that he should be killed for the good of the state. In doing so, she acts in a way that Savonarola himself had advised, as is apparent when she says,

> "Father, you yourself declare that there comes a moment when the soul must have no guide but the voice within it, to tell whether the consecrated thing has sacred virtue." (p. 576)

Romola retains the natural human sympathies that Savonarola has lost, the sympathies that make it possible for her to see what he cannot: that it is wrong to condemn Bernardo and the others to death. Her behavior is consistent with Eliot's feminine ideal while Savonarola's is not.

The fact that Romola's dilemma in this important scene is identical with Antigone's dilemma in Sophocles' play provides a link between Romola's pagan past and Christian present, and this link is important to an understanding of the novel as a whole. While her "passionate repugnance" is similar to the feelings that originally motivated Savonarola, the skepticism that she feels--indeed, has always felt--for much of his dogma can be attributed to her father's teaching. The same proud integrity that prevented Bardo from taking orders as a priest in order to advance his career as a scholar is present in Romola. And this integrity is exhibited not just in this scene but throughout the novel. Although she admires Savonarola, she does

not accept all of his dogma. When she finds Tessa being harassed by the boys who are collecting the anathema, she prevents them from taking the necklace that Tito had given Tessa. She does not believe that Tessa's love for her necklace is inevitably wrong any more than she believes absolutely in the truth of Savonarola's visions.

It is this skepticism combined with her deep feelings for the suffering of the poor that the artist, Piero de Cosimo, recognizes in her when he refers to her as "Madonna-Antigone," not simply "Madonna-Romola" as the people of Florence have begun to call her. The dual qualities that the epithet Madonna-Antigone implies make it possible for Romola to achieve an understanding that neither her father nor Savonarola could. In the epilogue, she acknowledges the debt she owes both to her father and to Savonarola, and she is able to do this because she can both see the truth about them and feel sympathy for them.

Two essays by Eliot are useful in explaining Romola's and Eliot's attitude towards Savonarola. In the essay on the Antigone, Eliot maintains that one of the truths which the play illustrates is that "we shall never be able to attain a great right without also doing a great wrong."[23] An awareness of Eliot's belief in this "truth" helps to clarify her distrust of the kind of political action that Savonarola attempts. Another essay by Eliot, which reviews

two books by Wilhelm Heinrich von Riehl, also helps clarify Eliot's analysis of Savonarola. In "The Natural History of German Life," Eliot discusses Riehl's contention that attempts by the German government to reorganize the life of the peasants had been disastrous because the reforms had not arisen naturally out of the historical characteristics of the peasants. Eliot concurs completely with Riehl's argument, as can be seen when she says,

> the more deeply we penetrate into the knowledge of society in its details, the more thoroughly we shall be convinced that a universal social policy has no validity except on paper, and can never be carried into successful practice.[24]

Eliot sees Savonarola's plans for reform in Florence as a "universal social policy" which accomplishes a "great wrong" though its intention is to attain a "great right." Savonarola errs in the same way that Bernardo, Eliot's representative of the gentleman in the novel, does, by trying to impose on others his own beliefs about how society should be ordered.

In contrast, the influence that Savonarola has on Romola and the influence that Romola herself has on others are more natural and more beneficial. Romola's influence on others is the sort of active influence demanded by Eliot's feminine ideal. Even after she has rejected Savonarola and has fled Florence for the second time,

Romola is still motivated by the sympathy for others that she has learned from him. In fact, she has the same sort of influence on the people of the village where her boat drifts as Savonarola had upon her in Florence. The narrator says that after Romola had been in the village for a while, the villagers'

> suspicion that Romola was a supernatural form was dissipated, but their minds were filled instead with the more effective sense that she was a human being whom God had sent over the sea to command them. (p. 648)

The lack of realism in this scene has, understandably, bothered many critics. Eliot herself says in a letter that the

> various strands of thought I had to work out forced me into a more ideal treatment of Romola than I had foreseen at the outset--though the "Drifting away" and the Village with the Plague belonged to my earliest vision of the story and were by deliberate forecast adopted as romantic and symbolic elements.[25]

The unrealistic drifting away and Romola's awakening among suffering people who desperately need her help constitutes an admittedly clumsy attempt to suggest that the right way to alleviate human suffering is to act in response to the particular needs of individuals. Eliot describes Romola's thoughts about her experience in the village in this way:

> She had felt herself without bonds, without motive; sinking in mere egoistic complaining that life could bring her no content; feeling a right to say, "I am tired of life, I want to die." That thought had sobbed within her as she fell asleep, from the moment after her waking when the cry had drawn her, she had not even reflected, as she used to do in Florence, that she was glad to live because she could lighten sorrow--she had simply lived, with so energetic an impulse to share the life around her, to answer the call of need and do the work which cried aloud to be done, that the reasons for living, enduring, labouring, never took the form of argument.

Romola's despair about her loss of faith in Savonarola is replaced by an impulse to help the crying child. Romola is not motivated by any argument, any logical reasoning, but by her feelings, and completely forgetting her own unhappiness, she acts to relieve the suffering of the people in the village. Similarly, when she returns to Florence, she looks for Tessa and her children because of her feeling of responsibility for them, but this is not her only reason for seeking them out. It is a need within herself that makes her look for them:

> She never for a moment told herself that it was heroism or exalted charity in her to seek these beings; she needed something that she was bound specially to care for; she yearned to clasp the children and to make them love her. (p. 656)

Eliot suggests that it is not just sympathy for others but the need for love that provides the motivation for her feminine ideal.

The changes that Romola goes through in the course of the novel illustrate the theory that, as Bonaparte points out, Eliot shared with Comte--the belief that human evolution is moral evolution.[26] Romola's personal evolution takes her through the equivalent of the polytheistic and monotheistic stages of history to the positivist stage. By the end of the novel Romola has arrived at a point at which "all outward law becomes needless," an outcome that Eliot says can occur "only when duty and love have united in one stream and made a common force" (p. 169). Romola's life also illustrates her concurrence with the Comtean motto of "resignation and activity," which, as Bernard Paris says, exhorts man "to resign himself to the unalterable and to mitigate or eliminate accidental evils."[27] The unalterable duty that Romola recognizes for herself is her duty to care for Tessa, her children, and for Brigida, and more importantly, to influence the children so that they do not make the same mistakes that Tito did. We see her in the epilogue, therefore, advising Lillo to take Bardo and Savonarola as models.

While Romola's influence on the children is beneficial, it is not immediately clear how the principles of Eliot's feminine ideal can be translated to the political sphere. Romola's assumption of responsibility for her adopted family makes it impossible for her to do what she

tells Lillo that Savonarola had done, to spend her life "in struggling against powerful wrong, and in trying to raise men to the highest deeds they are capable of" (p. 675). Similarly, it prevents her from doing what she had hoped to do when she decided to flee from Florence the first time, that is, to go to Venice in order to ask Cassandra Fedele, who was employed by the Venetian state as its Latin orator, how she might find work as a scholar. The duties that Romola assumes place her among what Eliot refers to as those

> valiant workers whose names are not registered where every day we turn the leaf to read them, but whose labours make a part though an unrecognized part, of our inheritance, like the ploughing and sowing of past generations. (p. 410)

In this passage, Eliot is referring not only to people like Romola, who are not actively involved in politics, but to people like Piero Capponi whom she mentions briefly in chapter twenty-nine. Capponi had helped negotiate the treaty with France which contributed to ending the famine in Florence, and when he returns to the city, he receives a warm welcome from his fellow citizens. Capponi differs from both Tito and Savonarola by being "as little inclined to humour the people as to humour any other unreasonable claimants" (p. 332); in other words, he is disinterested in a way that neither of them is. And he is also active on

behalf of others, sacrificing his own comfort in his work for Florence in spite of the fact that he expects very little thanks for it. In fact, he is surprised when the citizens of Florence greet him with joy. Capponi is like "those whose names are not registered" but who nevertheless have a beneficial influence on the lives of others, as Eliot's feminine ideal requires. Romola's limited actions, when combined with the actions of many others like Piero Capponi are ultimately more effective, Eliot believes, than Savonarola's efforts radically to change the entire society. Though her influence is more limited than Savonarola's, Eliot maintains that it is more likely to be beneficial.

There is, however, another way of influencing others, and Eliot suggests what it is in the character of Piero di Cosimo, the artist. As William J. Sullivan has shown, Piero is concerned, like Eliot, with the strict observation of things as they are, but he is also able to reveal truths through his paintings that might otherwise be hidden.[28] In fact, Piero performs the same function in the novel that Eliot sets for the artist, a function she describes in the essay on Riehl when she says, "Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot."[29] This exactly describes what Piero does

when he paints the picture of Tito being grasped by Baldassare. In his painting, he records the truth that he has perceived: that Tito is a traitor, and the painting conveys that truth to Romola, who, when she sees it at Piero's studio, gets her first inkling of the truth about Tito. Piero's attempt to hide the painting from Romola suggests the indirect way in which art reveals truth. Piero does not use his art to prescribe rules of behavior; he uses it to record the details that make up reality, as his remarks in response to the charge that he is a Cynic reveal:

> "Not I, Messer Greco; a philosopher is the last sort of animal I should choose to resemble. I find it enough to live, without spinning lies to account for life. Fowls cackle, asses bray, women chatter, and philosophers spin false reasons--that's the effect the sight of the world brings out of them. Well, I am an animal that paints instead of cackling, or braying or spinning lies." (p. 247)

Like Piero, Eliot does not intend to use her novels to prescribe a set of rules which are intended to determine behavior. She intends instead to provide her readers with a picture of reality that will allow them to see the truth. But Eliot is not as successful in Romola in getting her ideas across to the reader as Piero is in his paintings. Romola is not really as successful an embodiment of her feminine ideal as Dorothea is to be. It is in Romola more

than any other novel that Eliot comes closest to wholeheartedly endorsing a philosophical theory, Comte's positivism, and she can only do this by using an ideal character such as Romola. Therefore, in spite of the care that Eliot took to make the novel realistic, Romola's story does not have the ring of truth. Eliot herself was painfully aware of this problem, and she set out to correct it in Middlemarch.

Notes

[1] R. H. Hutton, review, Spectator, July 1863, in George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, ed. David Carroll (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 200.

[2] Felicia Bonaparte, The Triptych and the Cross (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 238.

[3] J. B. Bullen, "George Eliot's Romola as a Positivist Allegory," Review of English Studies, 104 (1975), 428.

[4] Auguste Comte, "A General View of Positivism," in Auguste Comte and Positivism, ed., Gertrud Lenzer (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), pp. 372-89.

[5] Gordon Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), IV, 103-4. Hereafter referred to as Letters.

[6] Jerome Thale, The Novels of George Eliot (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 81-2.

[7] Andrew Sanders, introd., Romola, by George Eliot (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), pp. 15-16.

[8] Sanders, introd., Romola, p. 18.

[9] George Eliot, Romola, ed. Andrew Sanders (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 388. Subsequent references to this novel will be given following the quotation.

[10] J. R. de S. Honey, Tom's Brown's Universe (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company, Inc., 1977), p. 97.

[11] Robin Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 97.

[12] Bonaparte, The Triptych and the Cross, p. 171.

[13] K. M. Newton, George Eliot: Romantic Humanist (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981), pp. 13-27.

[14] Bonaparte, The Triptych and the Cross, p. 68.

[15] Newton, George Eliot: Romantic Humanist, p. 17.

[16] Daniel Donno, introd., The Prince and Selected Discourse: Machiavelli, by Niccolò Machiavelli (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 1.

[17] George Levine, "Romola as Fable," in Critical Essays on George Eliot, ed. Barbara Hardy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 88.

[18] Levine, "Romola as Fable," p. 94.

[19] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 53.

[20] Barbara Hardy, The Novels of George Eliot (London: The Athlone Press, 1959), p. 86.

[21] Haight, Letters, IV, 97.

[22] George Eliot, "The Antigone and its Moral," in Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 262.

[23] Eliot, "The Antigone and its Moral," p. 264.

[24] George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 289.

[25] Haight, Letters, IV, 104.

[26] Bonaparte, The Triptych and the Cross, p. 145.

[27] Bernard J. Paris, Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), p. 23.

[28] William J. Sullivan, "Piero di Cosimo and the Higher Primitivism in Romola," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 26, No. 4 (1972), 390-405.

[29] Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," p. 271.

CHAPTER V

Middlemarch

As she does in Romola, in Middlemarch Eliot tells the story of a woman's spiritual journey; Dorothea, like Romola, eventually achieves Eliot's feminine ideal of self-sacrifice and influence for good. Middlemarch also resembles Romola in that again Eliot examines the extent to which an individual guided by that ideal can influence society. But the story of English life differs markedly from the historical novel. Unlike Romola, Middlemarch links the feminine ideal to efficacious political reform, and this is done through Dorothea's story. Will Ladislaw, under Dorothea's influence, is able to contribute to the realization of a limited social reform. Will's political activity is made possible by the fact that he possesses the qualities that Eliot associates with her ideal combined with an education which allows him to act in a way that Dorothea finds impossible.

A dissatisfaction with the limitations that society places on a woman's ability to influence society directly, which is only hinted at in Romola, is more strongly expressed in Middlemarch. While Eliot seems to suggest in Romola that it is appropriate that the well-educated Romola

should devote herself solely to Tito's children, she says of Dorothea in the epilogue to Middlemarch that many people

> thought it was a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known as a wife and mother. But no one stated what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done . . .[1]

The restrictions on Dorothea's actions are in part imposed by the society in which she lives, which limits her education and her sphere of activity.

Dorothea's journey takes place in a very different sort of society from the one in Romola; Dorothea does not start with the same advantages that Romola does. In Middlemarch, there is neither a great spiritual leader like Savonarola nor a political leader who is as honorable as Bernardo. Instead, spiritual matters in Middlemarch are largely in the hands of Bulstrode, and the only character who is roughly comparable to Bernardo, who is the Florentine equivalent of the English gentleman, is the poorly informed and ineffectual Mr. Brooke. But these differences cannot be attributed solely to the fact that Middlemarch is a provincial city, which is only important as a center of trade, while Florence is an important center for trade, religion, politics, and art. For, as Leslie Stephen points out, Eliot suggests in Middlemarch that "'provincialism' is not really confined to the provinces."[2] The narrator

confirms this in an aside to the reader in which he says,

> . . . whatever has been or is to be narrated by me about low people, may be ennobled by being considered a parable; so that if any bad habits and ugly consequences are brought into view, the reader may have the relief of regarding them as not more than figuratively ungenteel, and may feel himself virtually in company with persons of some style. Thus while I write about loobies, my reader's imagination need not be entirely excluded from an occupation with lords. (p. 375)

The people of Middlemarch may be "loobies," or louts, in comparison to the people in Florence--they may not be as intelligent, as well-educated, or as well-informed--but they do share the same motivations and problems and many of the same beliefs.

This argument is not new for Eliot; as I have shown, she makes much the same comparison in Silas Marner. In that novel, too, Eliot examines the failure of the aristocracy and the church to provide moral leadership. But Raveloe is, according to Eliot, cut off from the main currents of English life, as one might expect the setting of a fable to be. Unlike the life that people in Raveloe live, the kind of life that people live in Middlemarch is typical, Eliot believes, of the lives of the majority of the people in England. Their lives are characterized by the pursuit of narrow self-interest, which may be honestly expressed, even relished, as it is in the case of a man

like Peter Featherstone, or which may masquerade as a concern for society, as it does in the cases of Bulstrode and Mr. Brooke. Small wonder, then, that Mr. Brooke proves to be of no use as a guide for Dorothea, whose desires are so different from his own.

In fact, Dorothea receives no guidance at all, except an obviously imperfect education. Eliot suggests that the inevitable result of the disparity between Dorothea's unselfish desires and the society in which those desires must be realized is, a she says in the Prelude, "a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity" (p. 25). Dorothea's mistakes, indeed, the mistakes that most of the characters in Middlemarch make in the process of deciding on or realizing their vocations are in part the result of the "imperfect social state" (p. 896) in which they live.

The particular kind of progress toward a positivist ideal, which Eliot linked in Romola's story to her feminine ideal, is not possible, then, in a society such as the one presented in Middlemarch. In fact, Eliot does not associate her feminine ideal, as it is represented by Dorothea, with positivism at all. As James F. Scott has shown in his essay on positivism in Middlemarch, the novel is critical of Comte's belief that power should shift in modern society from the clergy and the gentry to the capitalist and the

scientist.[3] Bulstrode's misguided attempts to direct the spiritual welfare of the people of Middlemarch and his attempt to use Lydgate and the hospital to achieve his purposes reveal Eliot's disagreement with this aspect of Comte's system. Instead of being a representation of the ideal way in which Comte's historical theories may be realized in society, as Romola is, Middlemarch is a carefully observed description of the way that a society actually conducts itself on all levels.

As such, Eliot's portrait of life in Middlemarch resembles the studies of German life done by Wilhelm Heinrich von Riehl, which are discussed by Eliot in her essay, "The Natural History of German Life." Riehl carefully describes German life in all ranks, as Eliot describes English life in Middlemarch, and he draws inferences according to his careful observations. While Eliot is uncharacteristically uncommunicative in her comments about Middlemarch in her letters, her essay on Riehl, although written fifteen years before the novel, provides some indications of her intentions in writing the novel. The kind of social movement that Eliot recognizes as valuable must occur, after all, in spite of the chief characteristics of the bourgeoisie, which Riehl describes as those of the Philister, or Philistine. Riehl defines the Philister as, among other things, "always in the majority"

and as the "main element of unreason and stupidity in the judgment of a 'discerning public.'"[4] Writing in 1856, seven years before Matthew Arnold gave currency in England to the term Philistine, Eliot maintains that the term has a wider definition in literature, that it is

> the personification of that spirit which judges everything from a lower point of view than the subject demands--which judges the affairs of the parish from the purely egoistic or purely personal point of view--which judges the affairs of the nation from the parochial point of view, and does not hesitate to measure the merits of the universe from the human point of view.[5]

Eliot's definition exactly describes the attitude of most of the characters in the novel toward the important historical events that are taking place in England during the time at which the novel is set.

As Jerome Beaty has shown, Eliot's references to various political events, such as Catholic Emancipation, the progress of the First Reform Bill, and the death of King George IV are firmly grounded in the time frame of the novel, from September 30, 1829 to late May, 1832.[6] By doing this, Eliot implies the importance of these political events. However, the characters in the novel, from the Cadwalladers and Chettams who rejoice when the Reform Bill is defeated in the House of Lords, to Dagley, Mr. Brooke's unhappy tenant, who strongly favors reform, evaluate

political matters strictly in terms of what they perceive to be their own self-interest. Furthermore, matters of local interest, such as the scandal about Bulstrode and Lydgate and the marriage of Dorothea and Ladislaw, are far more important to the people of Middlemarch than political matters, no matter what their social level is. This combination of selfishness, ignorance, and indifference makes it seem highly unlikely that any kind of change or progress might originate in Middlemarch. It is not surprising, then, that contemporary critics like R. H. Hutton found Middlemarch the most melancholy of Eliot's work or that they objected to the large number of satiric remarks included in it.[7] But Eliot's concern when writing the novel was honestly to portray the limitations that society places on the realization of the feminine ideal, which includes a belief in reform with its emphasis on beneficial influence.

The greatest impediment to the realization of Eliot's active feminine ideal is, as usual in Eliot's fiction, the gentleman. But Eliot's examination of the gentleman in Middlemarch is much more detailed than it is in any of her previous novels. Instead of having a single individual as the primary representative of the gentlemanly ideal, as Sir Christopher is in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," as Bernardo is in Romola, as even Squire Cass is in Silas Marner, Eliot

suggests that the gentlemanly ideal can take a number of different forms in a number of different individuals. Only Daniel Deronda includes nearly as many different types of gentlemen as Middlemarch, in which Sir James Chettam, Mr. Brooke, Mr. Cadwallader, Mr. Casaubon, Lydgate, Farebrother, and Will Ladislaw are explicitly referred to by the narrator as gentlemen. With the exception of Ladislaw, whom I shall discuss later, and Mr. Brooke, each of these characters believes in a particular set of principles or beliefs which he uses to direct his behavior. As always, Eliot suggests that this sort of absolute belief in general principles inhibits rather than contributes to the gentleman's understanding of individual situations and people and to his ability to cope with them.

One of the most striking differences between the gentlemen in most of Eliot's previous novels and the gentlemen in Middlemarch is in the degree to which they are able actively to affect the world in which they live. Like Silas Marner, Middlemarch presents a far more realistic picture of the gentleman than do the somewhat idealized portraits of Sir Christopher and Bernardo. But, unlike Squire Cass in Silas Marner, the gentlemen in Middlemarch do not have the power to influence the society in which they live. Sir James Chettam, for example, is, like Sir Christopher, a baronet with a sense of responsibility for

his land and the people who live on it. He disapproves strongly of Mr. Brooke's poor management of his land, saying "I do think one is bound to do the best for one's land and tenants, especially in these hard times" (p. 416). Even so, this sense of responsibility is not wholly unselfish, as Sir James says, "I don't believe a man is in pocket by stinginess on his land" (p. 417). He is acting at least in part out of self-interest.

Sir James is also similar to Sir Christopher in his attitude towards women. When Dorothea is thinking of marrying Casaubon, he tries to get Cadwallader to do something to prevent it. And after Casaubon dies and the codicil to his will is known, he again expresses his disgust at Mr. Brooke's indifference. The narrator says of Sir James's attitudes that "he had a chivalrous nature (was not the disinterested service of Woman among the glories of old chivalry?)" (p. 319). Add to this belief that a man's mind "has always the advantage of being masculine and even his ignorance is of a sounder kind" and Sir James seems the type of the gentleman in Eliot's earlier novels.

But this sense of responsibility for his tenants and this attitude toward women are the only points of similarity between Sir Christopher and Sir James, for Sir James has neither the intelligence nor the abilities of Sir Christopher, who is in many ways the most admirable of

Eliot's gentlemen. Eliot makes it clear early on that Sir James is rather stupid when he uses the word genus instead of genius to describe Dorothea and her plans for the cottages. And his only contribution to their discussions of the plans is to say "Exactly" whenever Dorothea makes a pause while outlining her theories. Furthermore, he exhibits a gentlemanly reticence about touching on unpleasant subjects like Dorothea's marriage and the codicil to the will, which he tries to get others to do something about. The narrator remarks that "Sir James was shy, even with men, about disagreeable subjects" (p. 575), and when Dorothea is present, he feels an "utter hopelessness in his own power of saying anything unpleasant" (p. 676).

Therefore, Sir James is incapable of influencing individuals for the good, an ability that Eliot considers the most beneficial. He is incapable of forming opinions on most subjects of wider significance, as he himself admits. His diffidence, combined with his lack of intelligence, limits him to the kind of feeble response he makes to Mr. Brooke's standing for election: "'I do wish people would behave like gentlemen,' said the good baronet, feeling that this was a simple and comprehensive programme for social well-being" (p. 417). Sir James cannot see the real flaws in Mr.Brooke that make his standing for election ridiculous; he can only express his own unarticulated

feeling that reform is wrong by saying that a gentleman would not attempt reform.

The flaw that actually makes Brooke a poor candidate is the same flaw that makes him a poor landlord and a poor guardian for Dorothea. Unlike Sir James, who has some understanding of his own limitations, Mr. Brooke believes that he has found the key to arriving at a correct opinion on all subjects. That key is, as he says, not going "too far" into any subject but instead learning just enough about it to see that a whole-hearted devotion to it would be a mistake. Mr. Brooke actually has no absolute beliefs, but Eliot does not disapprove of that. What she does disapprove of is Brooke's unwillingness to acquire more than a smattering of knowledge in any particular field. He is, in fact, a sloppy thinker of the sort described by Eliot in her essay, "The Influence of Rationalism":

> For the most part, the general reader of the present day does not exactly know what distance he goes; he only knows that he does not go "too far." Of any remarkable thinker, whose writings have excited controversy, he likes to have it said that "his errors are to be deplored," leaving it not too certain what those errors are; he is fond of what may be called disembodied opinions, that float in an undefined Christianity which opposes itself to nothing in particular, an undefined education of the people, an undefined amelioration of all things: in fact, he likes sound views--nothing extreme, but something between the excesses of the past and excesses of the present. . . . His only bigotry is a bigotry against any clearly-defined opinion; not in the least based on a scientific skepticism, but

> belonging to a lack of coherent thought--a spongy texture of mind, that gravitates strongly to nothing.[8]

It is just such "a spongy texture of mind" that brings about Brooke's humiliation as a candidate. When he is distracted by the jeering mob during his speech in Middlemarch, he is unable to recover because he has only a superficial knowledge of the subjects about which he is supposed to speak, in spite of Will Ladislaw's careful attempts to prepare him. He even uses his favorite maxim to describe why he cannot go on as a candidate, implying at the same time that he is concerned about his health, "I have felt uneasy about the chest--it won't do to carry that too far . . . I must pull up" (p. 551). Brooke's pride will not allow him to admit his own unfitness for politics, just as he had earlier claimed that he had not previously made a larger figure in the world only because of his own indolence. As funny as this rationalization is, there is an element of truth in it. Brooke is not ineffectual because he is stupid, like Sir James; he is ineffectual because he has never exerted himself.

Brooke's unwillingness to exert himself has the same disastrous results in his role as a guardian as it does in his role as a politician. He says that he refrains from exerting himself on behalf of Dorothea for the same reason

that Mr. Cadwallader, another gentleman, refrains from interfering with her plans to marry Casaubon. Brooke says that he agrees with Cadwallader, who argues that he should not interfere because he does not know for sure that the marriage is a mistake. Cadwallader's argument is an example of the type of gentlemanly objectivity, or disinterestedness, that Eliot admires a great deal. But even Cadwallader is not purely objective, since he implies that if Dorothea were his daughter, he might feel differently about interfering. And what passes for objectivity in Brooke is really ignorance. Brooke's real reasons for refusing to interfere is not that he is disinterested; it is that he does not have the ability to evaluate the situation. He knows very little about marriage and very little about Casaubon and does not attempt to learn more. He simply warns Dorothea in general terms about the problems that might occur in marriage.

Mr. Brooke is also unwilling to exert himself on behalf of his tenants, a failure that makes him very different from the gentleman as Eliot usually portrays him. Mr. Brooke is incapable of understanding what even Sir James has grasped about his own land: that an unwillingness to spend money on improvements is in the long run financially imprudent. But, more importantly, Mr. Brooke lacks the sympathy for his tenants that Sir James genuinely

feels; he is unmoved by Dorothea's description in chapter thirty-nine of the miserable conditions under which the Dagleys live. His attitude to those conditions is, as the narrator says, like that of an "observer, under that softening influence of the fine arts which makes others' hardships picturesque" (p. 429). Significantly, Brooke refers to the poet Edward Young in a digression he introduces to avoid Dorothea's attempt to influence him to change the conditions on his estate. Eliot had vilified Young's poetry in an essay in the Westminster Review as exhibiting a "want of genuine emotion" because of his reliance on abstractions to achieve his effects.[9] Brooke exhibits this same want of emotion when he criticizes a Methodist preacher who had been poaching on his land for not being like Young's "higher style of man" because he is wearing shabby gaiters. Brooke does not stop to think that the poaching and the shabby gaiters are the result of the man's poverty. Nor does he question the practice of preserving a gentleman's game for the purpose of hunting while tenants go hungry.

Similarly, Brooke does not consider the Dagleys as individuals; therefore, he can view their "hardships" as "picturesque." Only after Dagley defies him and tells Brooke what he really thinks of him is Dorothea able to persuade her uncle to rehire Caleb Garth to take care of

the estate. Even then, it is not the kind of sympathy demanded by Eliot's feminine ideal for Dagley or understanding of Dagley's plight that brings about the change; it is Mr. Brooke's pride. He wants to think well of himself, and he cannot do so as easily as he could before Dagley's outburst. This desire to think well of himself is a form of selfishness that Mr. Brooke shares with almost all of Eliot's gentlemen. However, combined with his lack of adherence to any single set of principles, it makes him more open to change than some of the other gentlemen in the novel.

For example, Mr. Brooke is more open to change than either Casaubon or Lydgate, each of whom is searching for a "key" that will explain everything in the field of study that he has chosen. Unlike Brooke, they believe that there is a single set of principles which, once discovered, will make all things clear to them; one might say that the key for which each is searching is the key to the meaning of life. Therefore, though they are not limited by ignorance or stupidity, they are limited by their own absolute beliefs.

The fact that Lydgate ignores details that do not agree with his theory is ironic, considering that his chief ambition is to "contribute towards enlarging the scientific, rational basis of his profession" (p. 177).

Lydgate's search for the primitive tissue from which all human organs are formed is linked to his desire to discover the sources of all human misery. Lydgate believes that there is a scientific explanation for human suffering and so in his research he is attempting

> to pierce the obscurity of those minute processes which prepare human misery and joy, those invisible thoroughfares which are the first lurking-places of anguish, mania, and crime, that delicate poise and transition which determine the growth of happy or unhappy consciousness. (p. 194)

Lydgate's theory that the source of human crime and misery is to be found in human tissue does not take into account the fact that there are other factors contributing to it. For example, he does not take into account the kind of causes lying behind what is to be his own personal failure. The chain of events beginning with his marriage to Rosamond, leading to his becoming involved with Bulstrode's crime, and resulting in his becoming merely a fashionable doctor is in large part the result of his arrogance and his unwillingness to concern himself with details.

Casaubon's attempt to explain pagan myths as corruptions of the true Biblical story requires as great a leap of faith as Lydgate's explanation for the origins of human evil and misery, but Casaubon is not willing to test his theory as Lydgate the scientist must. As W. J. Harvey has

shown, the work of mythographers like Casaubon, which included an absurd attempt to trace every modern word back to a Hebrew root, was effectively refuted by German scholars who, early in the nineteenth century, showed that both mythologies and families of languages in Europe developed independently.[10] Thus, as Will Ladislaw points out, Mr. Casaubon is engaged in research whose futility he might recognize if he could read German. Mr. Casaubon is just as ignorant in his way as Mr. Brooke is in his, and Eliot makes an explicit comparison between the two when Brooke advises Casaubon to file his notes in pigeonholes as he himself does. The futility of Casaubon's research is fully established when the narrator says that

> Mr. Casaubon's theory of the elements which made the seed of all tradition was not likely to bruise itself unawares against discoveries: it floated among flexible conjectures no more solid than those etymologies which seemed strong because of likeness in sound, until it was shown that likeness in sound, made them impossible: it was a method of interpretation which was not tested by the necessity of forming anything which had sharper collisions than an elaborate notion of Gog and Magog: it was as free from interruption as a plan for threading the stars together. (p. 520)

While Lydgate's beliefs can be tested, Casaubon's beliefs exist in a vacuum. Even if Casaubon's theory could be proven true, the immediate benefits of such a discovery are unclear since it would be impossible for the world to

return to that ideal time when everyone spoke the same language and shared the same myth. No wonder Casaubon describes his own mind as being "like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying mentally to construct it as it used to be" (p. 40). He is, in fact, very much like Bardo in Romola, who cuts himself off from the present by his devotion to the past.

Although the research of both Lydgate and Casaubon is misguided, Lydgate at least is working in a science which has the potential to be beneficial to others. And Lydgate does do much good in his work with the poor in the hospital in Middlemarch. Lydgate's belief that he has a responsibility to help the poor distinguishes him from Casaubon, just as Sir James's sense of responsibility to his tenants distinguishes him from Mr. Brooke. Lydgate's search for the key that will prove his theories true does not cut him off from others in the way that Casaubon's search for the key to all mythologies does.

A similar distinction can be made between Casaubon and Lydgate with regard to the way they evaluate people and events, most importantly in the way they evaluate women. While each of them judges others according to a set of preconceived ideas or rules that he believes in absolutely, Lydgate is capable of feeling much more for others than Casaubon is. For example, Casaubon has supported Will

Ladislaw for many years not because of his affection for him, but because "he was resolute in being a man of honour according to the code; he would be unimpeachable by any recognized opinion" (p. 313). Similarly, Casaubon marries Dorothea in part because he has reached the age at which society expects a man to be married, not because he loves her. In fact, he is surprised when he does not feel what the expectations of society have predicted that he should.

Casaubon conforms more strictly than any of the other gentlemen in Middlemarch to what he considers to be the gentlemanly codes of behavior; he does the very least he can do which will allow him to consider himself as having conformed to the code. But the most important reason Casaubon marries Dorothea is his belief that she will be a suitable secretary for him, and he prefers her to Will Ladislaw or any other man he might hire because of what he considers to be "the characteristic excellences of womanhood" (p. 73). He expects that a "modest young lady, with the purely appreciative, unambitious abilities of her sex, is sure to think her husband's mind powerful" (p. 313). Casaubon's own expectations blind him to the fact that Dorothea has a very real desire to learn and a capacity to see the truth about his futile scholarship. But when he becomes aware that she is capable of judging his work and pities him because she realizes its futility, he begins to

feel that

> marriage, like religion and erudition, nay, like authorship itself, was fated to become an outward requirement, and Edward Casaubon was bent on fulfilling unimpeachably all requirements. (p. 315)

He cannot make Dorothea a real part of his life in any way; he would even prevent her from helping him in his studies if he could do so without making others question his motives. Thus, all of Casaubon's actions are dictated by a set of rules that is determined strictly by the limited requirements that society places on him.

In contrast, the way that Lydgate responds to people and events is dictated not by outward requirements but by his own prejudices, or, as Eliot calls them, his "spots of commonness." He allows his prejudices to dictate his responses; as the narrator says,

> . . . that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour did not penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture and women, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons. (p. 179)

This passage suggests that Lydgate does not apply the same tests to his theories about social rank and women that he applies to his scientific theories. In fact, he uses only deductive reasoning when he makes personal judgments, and Eliot makes her opinion of such reasoning clear in her

essay, "The Influence of Rationalism," when she says, "There is nothing like acute deductive reasoning for keeping a man in the dark."[11]

In spite of his determination to "take a strictly scientific view of women" (p. 183) after the incident with Laure in Paris, Lydgate falls in love with Rosamond because of what he believes her to be rather than what she is. He believes that she fulfills the ideal of "perfect womanhood" that exists in his own mind, that she is an

> accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment. (p. 387)

Lydgate's ideas about women, in fact, are those of a romantic and spring from his own highly emotional nature. He ignores the possibility that, as is actually the case, Rosamond actually possesses none of these particular qualities, and his blindness leads to disastrous consequences. That Lydgate's ultimate downfall is brought about in large part as a result of Rosamond's own imperviousness to reason makes for a nice irony.

Furthermore, Lydgate's attitude toward money is just as narrow as his attitude towards women and brings about his own financial ruin and involvement in the scandal over

Raffles' death. Lydgate's attitude toward Farebrother's gambling demonstrates his feelings about money; it is said of him that "he had an ideal of life which made this subservience of conduct to the gaining of small sums thoroughly hateful to him" (p. 209). But this distaste for a concern with the "gaining of small sums" makes him ignore the discrepancies between his income and his expenditure when setting up housekeeping with Rosamond, despite a warning from Farebrother. Eventually, it leads to his accepting money from Bulstrode, money that his conscience tells him may be more in the nature of a bribe than he would like to think.

In addition, Lydgate's disdain for the opinions of others, such as their belief in the practice of doctors' selling drugs, offends many people in Middlemarch and limits his practice. By arrogantly attempting to make a distinction between his own behavior and the self-interested behavior of the inhabitants of Middlemarch, Lydgate, in effect, makes himself subservient to the most self-interested of them all. He allows Bulstrode to use him not only in his schemes for the hospital but he becomes an accessory in Bulstrode's crime. Lydgate's beliefs about himself prove to be as wrong-headed as his prejudices about others. As is the case with most of the other gentlemen in the novel, Lydgate's absolute beliefs prevent him from

responding to people as individuals rather than according to his own preconceived notions.

There is, however, one gentleman in Middlemarch who is not typical of those who usually appear in Eliot. Rev. Camden Farebrother knows himself and others far better than most of Eliot's gentlemen, and so he comes far closer to fulfilling the gentlemanly ideal, as it has been defined by Shirley Letwin.[12] Like Lydgate, Farebrother is or aspires to be a scientist. But Farebrother differs from Lydgate in that, as an entomologist, he is a careful observer and cataloguer of facts rather than a theorist, and Eliot uses this fact to suggest that he does not share the same sorts of prejudices as Lydgate. For Farebrother applies the rules that govern his particular science to other areas of his life. He is as careful an observer of himself and others as he is of his collections of insects, while Lydgate evaluates all people as he does Rosamond, according to his own preconceived notions about what they must inevitably be like.

Farebrother's objectivity allows him to keep himself independent of Bulstrode's party, while Lydgate is drawn into Bulstrode's schemes because of his personal prejudices. The two, in fact, have a conversation about whether it should be necessary to "humour everybody's nonsense" in order to make one's way in Middlemarch, and Farebrother

attempts to advise Lydgate that it is not as easy as he thinks to keep oneself independent of special interest groups. Lydgate says that the "shortest way is to make your value felt, so that people must put up with you whether you flatter them or not" (p. 204). Farebrother's wider experience has already made him aware that doing what Lydgate suggests is not easy, and he responds, "With all my heart. But then you must be sure of having the value, and you must keep yourself independent. Very few men can do that" (p. 214). Ironically Lydgate is shortly to prove the truth of Farebrother's remarks. He is not able to make his value felt in Middlemarch because of his arrogance in his dealings with others, and, as a result, he is not able to keep his independence. On the other hand, Farebrother has been able to keep his independence; as a clergyman, he has kept himself free of the kind of narrow, self-righteous behavior that Bulstrode practices and demands of others. Farebrother will not pretend to go along with Bulstrode in order to get the job of chaplain to the hospital, a position he needs since he has his mother, aunt, and sister to support.

Farebrother performs his duty to his family cheerfully, in spite of the fact that their dependence "had in many ways shaped his life rather uneasily for himself" (p. 207). Because he must support them, he cannot indulge

his interest in entomology as he would like to do. But he does find a way of indulging it to a certain extent. Instead of going along with Bulstrode, Farebrother prefers to gamble, playing at whist and billiards to support his hobby, though he knows that his gambling does not provide a good example to young men like Fred Vincy. And he does stop gambling after he receives the living at Lowick. Before he gets the living, he describes his behavior by saying, "I feed a weakness or two lest they should get clamorous" (p. 207). The weakness that Farebrother is referring to is his preference for science, and he feeds that weakness by choosing a way of supporting it, among those that are open to him, that will have the least effect on what he considers to be his duties as a clergyman. Again, ironically, Lydgate despises Farebrother for what he considers to be a weakness on his part, while in reality Lydgate himself is far weaker since he has gone along with Bulstrode.

Farebrother's objectivity, then, is a real objectivity based on knowledge, instead of being the kind of objectivity that most of Eliot's gentlemen exhibit, one based on a belief in a certain set of principles whose truth is untested. But while his knowledge of himself and his own weaknesses contributes to his ability to do his duty as a clergyman, it at the same time makes Farebrother somewhat

cynical. This cynicism is sometimes helpful, as in the case of Fred Vincy. When Fred comes to Farebrother for advice about whether he can hope to marry Mary Garth, the parson is able to advise him because he does not judge Fred solely in terms of his gambling. Farebrother's knowledge of his own weakness makes him tolerant of Fred's weakness, and he advises Fred about what he must do in order to win Mary in spite of the fact that he loves Mary himself. The same objectivity that gives him an understanding of himself makes him act against his own self-interest.

But this objectivity has a different effect on his effort to help Lydgate. When Lydgate is suspected of having been bribed by Bulstrode to suppress facts about his past and to cover up the murder of Raffles, Farebrother supports Sir James in his attempt to prevent Dorothea from trying to help Lydgate, saying,

> "It is possible--I have often felt so much weakness in myself that I can conceive even a man of honourable disposition, such as I believe Lydgate to be, succumbing to such a temptation as that of accepting money which was offered more or less as a bribe to insure his silence about facts long gone by." (p. 790)

Farebrother's knowledge of human nature, in this case, makes him too quick to accept the conventional wisdom about Lydgate. Therefore, he does not take the kind of action that Dorothea's feelings prompt her to take. Even the kind

of real objectivity that directs Farebrother's actions is inadequate when compared with the passion of Dorothea's activity on Lydgate's behalf.

Much of the moral bleakness that the early critics of Middlemarch so often complained of in the novel arises from the fact that it is not the more admirable characters like Farebrother, or any of the other gentlemen, who have the most power in the city. Rather, it is Bulstrode who has it. He controls most financial and charitable matters in Middlemarch, and he tries to control spiritual matters as well. In fact, the narrator says that "It was a principle with Mr. Bulstrode to gain as much power as possible, that he might use it for the glory of God" (pp. 184-85). This principle makes Bulstrode care above all else for his own self-interest.

The way that Bulstrode goes about using his power for God's glory is demonstrated by his real purpose in endowing the new charitable hospital. When he is explaining Lydgate's duties to him, Bulstrode says that the patients' physical well-being is less important to him than their spiritual well-being, that the hospital's real purpose is evangelical, not medical or scientific. In effect, this means that only if people profess to believe as Bulstrode does will they be admitted to the hospital, just as it means that only a clergyman who believes as Bulstrode does

will be appointed chaplain. As Mr. Vincy says, Bulstrode wants to "play bishop and banker everywhere" (p. 159). Therefore, Bulstrode's beliefs lack even the semblance of the gentleman's objectivity.

Bulstrode is, in fact, not a gentleman in any sense. The fact that he cheated his first wife's daughter of her inheritance indicates that he lacks even Casaubon's emotionless sense of responsibility, for Casaubon sought out Ladislaw and supported his studies because of the unfairness of his grandfather's will. And unlike Farebrother, Bulstrode does not know himself or his own weaknesses because he has not admitted them to himself. Thus he is intolerant of weakness in others, as he demonstrates when Mr. Vincy asks him to intercede with Featherstone on Fred's behalf. Only when Mr. Vincy points out that Bulstrode's wife, Vincy's sister, will be displeased if he does not help Fred does Bulstrode agree to write the letter. Bulstrode agrees to help only when he sees that his own life will be affected by his wife's displeasure. Bulstrode's self-interested behavior reflects Eliot's concern about the lack of moral direction in a society which lacks the gentleman's sense of responsibility for others, as wrong-headed as she thinks the gentleman often is.

Bulstrode's method of justifying his behavior to himself is interesting because it shows that Eliot conceived of Bulstrode as one who is striving to play the same sort of role in Middlemarch that Savonarola plays in the Florence of Romola. The narrator describes Bulstrode's motives in this way:

> And to Bulstrode God's cause was something distinct from his own rectitude of conduct: it enforced a discrimination of God's enemies, who were to be used merely as instruments, and whom it would be well if possible to keep out of money and consequent influence. Also, profitable investments in trades where the power of the prince of this world showed its most active devices, became sanctified by a right application of the profits in the hands of God's servant. (pp. 667-68)

This rationalization allows Bulstrode to absolve himself from personal guilt while at the same time allowing him to judge those who, according to his thinking, do not act for the glory of God. Bulstrode's belief seems to echo Savonarola's defense of the death penalty for the Mediceans, "The cause of my party is the cause of God's kingdom."[13] At that point in Romola, Savonarola's position is as indefensible as Bulstrode's is in Middlemarch, and for the same reason: religious fanaticism.

But Bulstrode is really very different from Savonarola. Bulstrode's intolerance for the sins of

others, which springs from his unwillingness to admit to the wrongs he himself has done, makes it impossible for him to have a positive influence on others, as Savonarola does. While Savonarola has a profound influence on individuals, Bulstrode cannot hope really to have a good influence on anyone because he does not care about them in the way Romola senses that Savonarola cares about her. Nor does his influence seem to count for much in the political field. Though, according to Farebrother, Bulstrode supports the cause of reform, he is apparently not active in advancing it, as we hear nothing of his trying to help Brooke get elected. As the narrator remarks,

> There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men. (p. 668)

Like Savonarola at the end of Romola, Bulstrode has, in Feuerbach's words, "sacrificed love to God."[14]

Bulstrode has lost any feelings he might once have had for others, and this loss is reflected not only in his attempts to force his religion on others but in his business dealings as well. He is a "sleeping partner in trading concerns, in which his ability was directed to economy in the raw material, as in the case of the dyes which rotted Mr. Vincy's silk" (p. 667). In order to have

more money with which to advance God's cause, Bulstrode practices economy in the choice of dyes. But the effect of what he does is very different from what he intends it to be. This adherence to his own particular "general doctrine" poisons the entire society; everyone is affected by his economies, from Vincy to the people who buy the silk.

More important, Bulstrode's insistence that everyone profess to believe as he does helps to make narrow self-interest the principle on which the society in Middlemarch is based. It is Bulstrode's behavior that best illustrates the truth of Eliot's image of society as a web. Though he does not have the kind of positive influence that Eliot's ideal demands, he has a great effect upon society in his combined roles of "bishop" and "banker." As "banker," Bulstrode has the power to give preferment only to those who profess to believe as he does in his role of "bishop." As a result, those who do not share his evangelical beliefs are encouraged to go along with them in order to advance their own self-interest, as Lydgate is when he votes for Tyke instead of Farebrother for chaplain of the hospital.

The character in the novel who provides the most direct contrast to Bulstrode is Caleb Garth, one of those who represents Eliot's feminine ideal of self-sacrifice and influence for good. The chief difference between the two men is in their attitude towards business. While Bulstrode

engages in business for what he has convinced himself is a sacred purpose, Garth regards business itself as sacred, as this remark makes clear:

> . . . it would be difficult to convey to those who never heard him utter the word "business," the peculiar tone of fervid veneration, of religious regard, in which he wrapped it, as a consecrated symbol is wrapped in its gold-fringed linen. (p. 282)

By business, Garth means actual labor, the work that must be done to produce something. And it is the work itself that is sacred to him rather than a purpose for which he is doing the work; the fact that it is done well is important to him, not the money he makes. Therefore, Garth does not charge much money for the evaluations and surveying that he does. Rather than being motivated to work by greed, he is motivated by his emotional commitment to the work itself.

The dangers inherent in such behavior are demonstrated by the fact that Garth lost his job with Mr. Brooke when he refused to go along with his employer's shoddy management of his estate. In effect, Garth sacrifices his own self-interest to his devotion to "business." Garth's own purpose is larger than Brooke's devotion to what he perceives to be his self-interest. When the management of the estate is returned to him, Garth says that

> "it's a fine thing to come to a man when he's seen into the nature of business; to have a chance of getting a bit of the country into good fettle, as they say, and putting men into the right way with their farming, and getting a bit of good contriving and solid building done--that those who are living after will be the better for it." (p. 438)

Garth's greatest concern is that the influence of his labor will be good, that, as his wife says, his good work will remain although his name may be forgotten.

Garth's influence on society as a whole, however, is limited to his work; unlike Dorothea, he is not interested in reforming society and cannot understand Mr. Brooke's interest in politics when his own estate is in disrepair. In fact, the only time that Garth expresses anything like a political opinion is when he advises some of his workmen to stop protesting against the new railroad, saying, "Things may be bad for the poor man--bad they are; but I want the lads here not to do what will make things worse for themselves" (p. 605). In spite of his desire to improve things, Garth's influence on society is basically conservative.

Though Garth is only interested in influencing those who work for him, the good influence that he exerts on his workers is motivated by the same kinds of emotions that motivate Dorothea's desire to reform society. Garth's belief in Fred is not based on any objective standards; in

fact, if he approached the matter objectively, Garth could hardly think the best of Fred since he has been responsible for the Garths' loss of a considerable sum of money. But Garth does not have the gentleman's objectivity; his decision to give Fred a job is based on his belief that Fred is "good at bottom" and his feeling that, as he says to his wife, "'that young man's soul is in my hand; and I'll do the best I can for him, so help me God! It's my duty, Susan'" (p. 610).

Mrs. Garth is far more practical than her husband, as is apparent when they become responsible for Fred's debt; in fact, she possesses qualities Eliot usually associates with the gentleman. If it had not been for the money that she earned, they would have been unable to meet the debt. This supports Farebrother's opinion that Garth's marriage has been the making of him. Mrs. Garth supplies the objectivity and the practical sense that Garth lacks. Significantly, she is a teacher, who teaches stories from the classics and the rules of grammar to her own children and to others in the neighborhood. But Mrs. Garth's gentlemanly skepticism about Fred has no effect on Garth in this instance. The narrator says of Garth that "every one about him knew that on the exceptional occasions when he chose, he was absolute" and that he "never, indeed, chose to be absolute except on some one else's behalf" (p. 608).

Aware that she cannot change his mind because of the strength of his feeling, Mrs. Garth accepts her husband's decision. In effect, she gives in to Caleb's stronger emotional belief in Fred.

The narrator's question--"Which would turn out to have the more foresight in it--her rationality or Caleb's ardent generosity?" (p. 610)--is of course answered by the recounting of Fred's history in the epilogue. Garth's belief in Fred is vindicated by the fact that young Vincy becomes a responsible farmer and a good husband to Mary, who undoubtedly plays the same role in their marriage as her mother had done in the Garths' marriage. Fred's history suggests that the "ardent generosity" exhibited by Garth, who represents Eliot's feminine ideal, has a greater power of foresight than Mrs. Garth's rationality, which is very like the objectivity of the gentleman.

It is interesting that the kind of work that Garth is engaged in is the sort of work for which Dorothea, another representative of Eliot's feminine ideal in the novel, originally longs. This passage makes those similarities clear:

> . . . something she yearned for by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent, and since the time was gone for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? (pp. 112-13)

Although she, like Garth, is interested in good work, as her plans for new cottages reveal, this kind of action is closed to her because she is a woman and because of her social class.

But more importantly, Dorothea develops a desire to have a much greater influence on society as a whole than Garth does. Her first efforts, however, are extremely flawed. Unlike Romola, Dorothea has very imperfect guides for her actions; she develops her own theories out of her imperfect education and the limited resources available to her. As the narrator says, her "ardent nature turned all her small allowance of knowledge into principles, fusing her actions into their mould" (p. 225). Dorothea's desire to do good is turned to the development of her rather puritanical principles, such as her beliefs that she should give up the pleasure of riding and should not wear jewels. She takes pride in what she considers to be her own unique form of self-sacrifice. She even imagines that she has arrived at "some independent clearness" about why land should be entailed and eldest sons should have superior rights.

Like Casaubon and Lydgate, indeed, like most of the people with whom she comes in contact, Dorothea believes that there is a key which will unlock the meaning of life. That key, according to Dorothea, is a knowledge of the

classics; she believes that her ideas are flawed and asks herself, "how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not for the glory of God, when men who knew the classics appeared to conciliate indifference to cottages with zeal for the glory?" (p. 88). Dorothea regards classical literature, a knowledge of which Eliot has associated with the gentleman not only here but in Romola, as the source of all knowledge. Mr. Casaubon, therefore, seems to her to be someone who can open up the "provinces of masculine knowledge" which "seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly" (p. 88). Dorothea's absolute belief in such learning blinds her to the truth about Casaubon; thus, even Casaubon's passionless and ridiculous letter seems like a declaration of love to her. Ironically, Dorothea lacks the skepticism that Romola learned from her father, an attitude that he acquired from his study of the classics. In marrying Casaubon, Dorothea seeks out a duty which she proudly believes to be like that of Milton's daughters or Hooker's wife, imagining that she will be able to learn while she helps her husband. Unfortunately, her marriage to Casaubon proves to be very much like the relationships she idealized, but not in the way she imagines.

What Dorothea actually learns as a result of her marriage to Casaubon is a true self-sacrifice and the

knowledge that duties cannot be chosen, and she learns these things not from Casaubon himself but from her own experience. She does not have a "spiritual director" like Savonarola to guide her; rather, she learns self-sacrifice as Casaubon's wife, renouncing her own need for love because of her pity for him. Though her first impulse is to rebel when Casaubon rejects her pity after Lydgate tells him that he may have little time left, she comes to feel that such rebellion would be like "hurting a lamed creature" (p. 456). Her realization of his sensitivity about the failure of his research is a moment of crisis for her, and it makes her think her own rebellion would be unnecessarily cruel: "when she looked steadily at her husband's failure, she seemed to be looking along the one track where duty became tenderness" (p. 400). The kind of self-sacrifice she expresses here is very different from the kind in which she took so much pride before she was married. Giving up her riding and her jewels was actually a form of pride, and now she is sacrificing that same pride.

At a second moment of crisis in her life, Dorothea, like Romola, comes to think of her duty to others as an obligation. This moment comes when Dorothea finds Will Ladislaw with Rosamond, apparently declaring his love for her, and leaves without talking to Rosamond or attempting to explain Lydgate's actions to her. Because of her

disappointment in Will, her first impulse again is to abandon her desire to help Lydgate by talking to Rosamond. But after spending a sleepless night, she asks this question and comes to this realization:

> And what sort of crisis might not this be in three lives whose contact with hers laid an obligation on her as if they had been suppliants bearing the sacred branch? The objects of her rescue were not to be sought out by her fancy: they were chosen for her. (p. 846)

Dorothea learns that her responsibilities cannot always be chosen by herself, as she had tried to choose them by her marriage to Casaubon. She looks out her window to see a man with a bundle and a woman with a child and realizes that she has responsibilities to others just as they do and that she is "a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining" (p. 846).

While Romola's selfish withdrawal from her duties is prevented by Savonarola's telling her that men and women cannot choose their duties,[15] there is no such guide for Dorothea in Middlemarch. Therefore she tells Will, "I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl" (p. 427). And that religion is

> "That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil--widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower." (p. 427)

These remarks indicate that Dorothea is aware that there is no key to meaning in life, no absolute truth that is discoverable as Casaubon believed, and she has arrived at this knowledge as a result of her own experience. Eliot associates this belief here, as always, with her feminine ideal, but in this case, she does so more overtly than usual with the metaphor "widening the skirts of light."

A philosophy like Dorothea's, as we have already seen in the case of Caleb Garth, produces acts that, as Eliot says in the epilogue, are not "ideally beautiful." Dorothea's "passionate faults," like Garth's, arise from her desire to do good and her lack of knowledge about how to go about doing it. For example, she wants to do something good with the money Casaubon leaves her and comes up with a plan for founding an ideal community. She says, "I wished to raise money to buy land with and found a village which should be a school of industry" (p. 822). Eliot uses Dorothea's scheme to indicate that, in spite of all she has learned, she is just as ill-equipped for the kind of action she longs for as she was before her marriage. An ideal community like the one Dorothea wants to create could not

work if one believes Riehl's argument, as Eliot did, that a successful social order cannot be imposed but must develop naturally.[16]

But such flaws in her thinking do not prevent Dorothea from having a beneficial influence on others, as her influence on Lydgate reveals. In fact, her influence on Lydgate is like that demanded by Eliot's feminine ideal. She decides to try to help Lydgate against the advice of Sir James and Farebrother, who believe that Lydgate's character has changed and that she can do nothing about it. When Farebrother says that Lydgate's character may have become diseased, she responds, "'Then it may be rescued and healed'" (p. 791). And Dorothea proves to be right since her belief in Lydgate makes him tell her everything about this relationship with Bulstrode and enables her to convince others, such as Farebrother, that he was not as guilty as they had imagined. Though Lydgate sees that she cannot hope to make it possible for him to realize his original plans in Middlemarch (the narrator even refers to her as Quixotic), her action does have a profound effect on him:

> The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us; we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character. (p. 818)

Though limited by her lack of knowledge "of lower experience such as plays a great part in the world" (p. 822), Dorothea is able to influence Lydgate through the example of her own "noble nature."

Later, Dorothea influences Rosamond in much the same way, by trying to help her in spite of the fact that she believes that Will loves Rosamond instead of herself. Momentarily, Dorothea's action shocks Rosamond out of the "bland neutrality" which is the exact opposite of Dorothea's "ardent passion" and makes her sacrifice her own pride and tell Dorothea the truth about Will. Though there is a great difference between what Dorothea believes she can do and what she actually is capable of doing, she is able to influence Lydgate and Rosamond in a limited way through her example.

But Dorothea is capable of exerting a much greater influence on others than she has on the Lydgates, and her relationship with Will Ladislaw is evidence of this. When the two first meet, Will is the dilettante many critics believe him to be throughout the novel. But he is also a rebel, as he says of himself, though his rebellion is undirected. Will is a romantic; indeed, he is referred to as a "kind of Shelley" by Mr. Brooke. But, though he composes a poem to Dorothea, which he recites when he is walking to Lowick, he is not an artist. Will knows that he

does not want to live the kind of life that Mr. Casaubon has lived, but he does not know what he does want to do, apart from enjoying life, as he tells Dorothea. As a result of their conversation, Dorothea has the same sort of influence on Will that Caleb Garth has on Fred Vincy.

It is Dorothea who urges Will to find a profession, which results in his taking the job of Brooke's political advisor and editor of his newspaper. The narrator explains why Will had not taken up a profession before when he says,

> Our sense of duty must often wait for some work which shall take the place of dilettantism and make us feel that the quality of our action is not a matter of indifference. (p. 501)

In choosing his profession, Will is influenced largely by Dorothea's own goodness. She influences Will in the same way that she influenced Lydgate:

> . . . that simplicity of hers, holding up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them was one of the great powers of her womanhood. And it had from the first acted strongly on Will Ladislaw. (p. 829)

The humor with which Will's devotion to Dorothea is presented, his description of himself as her slave and the "remote worship of a woman" (p. 250) that inspires his comical visit to Lowick church, do not negate the very real influence she has on him.

Will's belief in the "quality" of his action becomes clear in an argument that he has with Lydgate about politics. Lydgate berates Will for "crying up a measure as if it were a universal cure, and crying up men who are a part of the very disease that wants curing" (p. 505). Though Will acknowledges that Brooke is far from being an ideal candidate, he asks if "we are to try for nothing till we find immaculate men to work with" (p. 506). Will has thoroughly left behind him the romantic idea that nothing should be done unless it can be done ideally, an idea that Lydgate strongly believes in (which may explain his giving in to Rosamond and becoming a fashionable doctor). Will believes instead that "your cure must begin somewhere, and put it that a thousand things which debase a population can never be reformed without this particular reform to begin with" (p. 506). As a result of Dorothea's influence, Will develops a realistic understanding of the rate at which progress can occur and becomes as ardent an advocate of political reform as she herself might be if she had the education needed to work for it, and of course, if she were not a woman.

Eliot believes that the conditions that limit Dorothea's own actions to influencing her husband are among those aspects of the "imperfect social state" which should be reformed, and this belief is revealed by passages like

this one in the prelude in which Dorothea is compared to Saint Teresa:

> Many Teresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity . . . (p. 25)

As her failure to exert her influence on Casaubon reveals, Dorothea's history is hardly an endorsement of Comte's theory that woman's ideal role is not to be an active member of society but to provide a moral influence on her husband and family. Rather, Dorothea's history suggests that, lacking the abilities and the opportunities of a George Eliot, exerting the kind of influence on Will that Comte demands of all women is the only role open to her.

Dorothea's influence on Will prevents him, then, from living the aimless life of a dilettante that William Heinrich von Riehl describes as characteristic of the Fourth Estate.[17] The breakup of what Riehl calls the "natural ranks" of society in Germany, the aristocracy, commercial class, and peasants, produces a fourth estate which includes not only factory operatives and artisans but a literary proletariat made up of younger sons of the aristocracy. The members of this literary proletariat, like Will, have no natural duties since they do not admin-

ister the land and cannot, as gentlemen, engage in business. Eliot makes Will, with his ties to Germany through his study at Heidelberg and through his family, a representative of this literary, or literate, proletariat and suggests that this group can be a factor for change in society, not negatively through the breakdown of the natural functions of the classes, but positively as agents for reform.

Will Ladislaw is able to work for reform because he combines the qualities that Eliot associates with the gentleman with the qualities that she associates with her feminine ideal. The fact that Will is indeed a gentleman, in spite of claims to the contrary by other characters in the novel is proven by Gordon Haight in his essay "George Eliot's 'eminent failure.'" Here Haight suggests that Will has more pretensions to the title than Lydgate.[18] Will's reaction to Bulstrode's offer of money confirms this. By rejecting Bulstrode's tainted money, even though he is entitled to it by law, he reveals himself to be far more objective than Lydgate, who accepts money from Bulstrode. In addition, Will demonstrates his sensitivity to the feelings of others when he refrains from mentioning his own rejection of the money to Lydgate. Will is a gentleman on the order of the Rev. Farebrother, but he differs from Farebrother in that he is more receptive to and more

capable of the kind of "ardent passion" that inspires actions like those which allow Dorothea to influence others.

But unlike Dorothea and Caleb Garth, Will has the capacity to exert this influence in the political world, first by writing about politics and then by becoming a member of parliament. By including a character like Will in Middlemarch, Eliot suggests that it is possible for those who represent her feminine ideal to exert the kind of influence that the ideal requires on a society as a whole, but it is only possible when, like Will, the character representing her ideal has the kind of education Will has had.

In Middlemarch, then, Eliot suggests that all efforts to effect a change in society need not end as disastrously as Savonarola's efforts to reform Florentine government did. Will Ladislaw's career as a member of parliament during the reform era, which so many critics have regarded as inconsequential is, to Eliot's way of thinking, ultimately more successful than Savonarola's career in Florence. Admittedly, no Florentine could have employed exactly the same means to change his society as Will employs in his work for reform in England. But Eliot suggests through her portrait of the gentlemanly Bernardo that something could have been done to change the way that politics and business were conducted in Florence. Bernardo

could have refused to go along with the Medicean plot to overthrow Savonarola; he could have advocated change as Will, a representative of Eliot's feminine ideal, does in Middlemarch. Though Will plays only a limited role in the reform movement in England, the reforms that he and others eventually bring about are lasting, while the republic that Savonarola works to create is destroyed partly as the result of Savonarola's own actions. Eliot is arguing in Middlemarch that while this kind of political action is not as impressive as Savonarola's grand struggle, it is the only way that real political progress can be effected in English society.

Notes

[1] George Eliot, Middlemarch, ed. W. J. Harvey (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 894. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

[2] Leslie Stephen, George Eliot (London: MacMillan, 1902), p. 174.

[3] James F. Scott, "George Eliot, Positivism and the Social Vision of Middlemarch," Victorian Studies, 16, No. 1 (1972), 62, 64.

[4] George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 295.

[5] Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," p. 297.

[6] Jerome Beaty, "History by Indirection: The Era of Reform in Middlemarch," Victorian Studies, 1, No. 2 (1957), 173-79.

[7] R. H. Hutton, unsigned reviews, Spectator, in George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, ed. David Carroll (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 291, 297-301.

[8] George Eliot, "The Influence of Rationalism," in Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 551.

[9] George Eliot, "Worldliness and Unworldliness: The Poet Young," in A George Eliot Miscellany, ed. R. B. Pinton (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982), pp. 16-17.

[10] W. J. Harvey, "The Intellectual Background of the Novel: Casaubon and Lydgate," in Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel, ed. David Carroll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 34-5.

[11] Eliot, "The Influence of Rationalism," p. 405.

[12] Shirley Robin Letwin, The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 68-73.

[13] George Eliot, Romola, ed. Andrew Sanders (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 587.

[14] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 53.

[15] Eliot, Romola, p. 430.

[16] Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," p. 289.

[17] Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," p. 198.

[18] Gordon S. Haight, "George Eliot's 'eminent failure': Will Ladislaw," in This Particular Web: Essays on 'Middlemarch', ed. Ian Adam (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 36-7.

CHAPTER VI

Daniel Deronda

Since its first publication in 1876, George Eliot's last novel, Daniel Deronda, has aroused controversy among critics. Most of this controversy surrounds what has come to be called the Jewish "half" of the novel, that is, the events surrounding Deronda's discovery that he is a Jew and his assumption of the role of prophet to his race. The most frequently advanced argument has from the first been that the Gwendolyn Harleth half of the novel is excellent while the Jewish half is execrable. This argument culminated in F. R. Leavis's extreme suggestion in The Great Tradition that the Jewish half should be cut away and that the novel by rights should be called Gwendolyn Harleth.[1] Other critical responses to the novel see Daniel Deronda as a radical departure from Eliot's other work. For example, the comparative ease with which Deronda learns the truth and assumes his heroic role and the unlikely events that make this possible led one early critic to regard the novel as being "both in conception and in form, a Romance."[2] Edward Dowden, another early critic whose sympathetic review was much appreciated by Eliot,[3] saw the novel as "a counterpoise or correlative of the work which immediately

preceded it."[4]

It cannot be denied that there is some truth in both of these arguments. Deronda's meeting with Mordecai and his rescue of Mirah, though no more coincidental than some of the events that occur in Eliot's other books, take on the character in this novel of supernatural events such as one might find in a romance. And Deronda's assumption of his heroic role at the end of the novel does seem to contradict the suggestion made by Dorothea's history in Middlemarch that the modern world makes heroic action impossible. Leavis's argument also has some validity since the most important Jewish characters who actually appear in the novel, especially Deronda, are portrayed as ideal figures, in sharp contrast to the "English" characters.

But to regard Daniel Deronda as simply more romantic, more optimistic, or more idealistic than Eliot's earlier work is to ignore the purpose she reveals in remarks she made in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe after the publication of the novel. These remarks allow one to link the Jewish section of her last novel to the criticism of the ideal of the gentleman and the development of her own feminine ideal in her earlier work. In her letter Eliot expresses surprise that the public has not responded even more unfavorably than it had to the "Jewish element" in her novel and gives her reasons for her rather idealized

portrait of the Jews:

> But precisely because I felt that the usual attitude of Christians towards Jews is--I hardly know whether to say more impious or more stupid when viewed in the light of their professed principles, I therefore felt urged to treat Jews with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain to. Moreover, not only towards the Jews, but towards all oriental peoples with whom we English come in contact, a spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness is observable which has become a national disgrace to us. There is nothing I should more care to do, if it were possible, than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow-men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs.[5]

The kind of "arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness" that Eliot mentions here is similar to the kind of behavior her readers should have come to expect of Eliot's gentlemen, behavior which is demonstrated in Daniel Deronda in varying degrees by the three gentlemen who are most important to the action: Sir Hugo Mallinger, Mr. Gascoigne, and Grandcourt. These gentlemen's attitudes not only to Jews but to most people and things are guided by a set of maxims which are seldom, if ever, questioned, and, like most of Eliot's gentlemen, they are not open to change of any sort, either personal, social, or political. This unwillingness to change makes these gentlemen, as is usual in Eliot's novels, essentially passive.

In direct opposition to the gentleman is Eliot's representative of her feminine ideal, in this case, Deronda himself, who demonstrates the same sort of "sympathy and understanding" for the Jews that Eliot herself felt. More importantly, Deronda's activity on behalf of others distinguishes him from the passive gentleman. Though Deronda is raised as a gentleman, he is not guilty of what Eliot describes in her letter as "this inability to find interest in any form of life that is not clad in the same coat-tails and flounces as our own."[6] However, in the beginning, Deronda's sympathies are not well-directed, and he must go through a learning process which not only makes it possible for him to influence Gwendolyn Harleth but also enables him to assume the heroic role of the Jewish Messiah. In Daniel Deronda, Eliot is concerned, as she is in Romola and Middlemarch, with the way an individual may exert the kind of influence required by her ideal on a society as a whole.

Eliot uses Deronda's history to suggest that the influence of one individual on another, the kind she has always considered most beneficial, can be used to effect political change. Deronda's influence on Gwendolyn serves as an example of the way in which an individual can use the power of ideas to change another person. Deronda's most lasting effect on Gwendolyn is that he makes her aware of another world and set of values that lie outside her own

narrow world--in fact, the world of the gentleman--and his influence on Gwendolyn is the same sort that he hopes to have on other individuals later when he tries to fulfill Mordecai's goal of founding a Jewish state.

In Daniel Deronda, Eliot does not give the reader the same broad picture of a complete society that she does in Middlemarch; rather, she focuses on the upper class, which she considers most guilty of the kind of narrow thinking that she describes in her letter to Stowe. Many of the main characters in the Gwendolyn section of the novel are gentlemen in the oldest sense of the word: that is, they are not obliged to work for a living. The working world, which is so well-represented in Middlemarch by the Garths, the Vincys, and others, makes its appearance only in the persons of the Meyrick women and the scene in which Rex is rescued by the blacksmith's boy after his fall from the horse.

The scene that takes place after Rex's accident establishes a distinction between the world inhabited by the working classes and the world of upper-class society which Rex (whose name is suggestive) inhabits at this time. The boy possesses practical knowledge which is completely foreign to Rex's world:

> Joel Dagge on this occasion showed himself that most useful of personages, whose knowledge is of

> a kind suited to the immediate occasion; he not only knew perfectly well what was the matter with the horse, how far they were both from the nearest public-house and from Pennicote Rectory, and could certify to Rex that his shoulder was only a bit out of joint, but offered experienced surgical aid.[7]

Joel not only grasps these practical details, which Rex is incapable of doing; he is also aware of much of the painful reality of life, which Rex has been shielded from:

> And Joel managed the operation, though not without considerable expense of pain to his patient, who turned so pitiably pale while tightening his mind, that Joel remarked, "Ah, sir, you aren't used to it, that's how it is. I's see lots and lots o' joints out. I see a man with his eye pushed out once--that was a rum go as ever I see. You can't have a bit o' fun wi'out such sort o' things." (p. 104)

Joel's remarks indicate the gulf that lies between him and Rex. The world of upper class society, the gentleman's world, shields him from the painful realities of life and contributes to his lack of understanding of others not exactly like himself. One might see this scene as Rex's initiation into a world which he himself is about to enter, where he will have to give up his hopes of marrying Gwendolyn and go to London to read law. But the focus of the novel continues to be the upper class, as Eliot indicates when she says, "Joel being clearly a low character, it is happily not necessary to say more of him to the refined reader" (p. 104). She turns her attention instead

to an examination of the gentleman's world, and she portrays him as usually cut off from the world of practical activity. Only Mr. Gascoigne must work in order to earn his living. Indeed, the gentleman in Daniel Deronda, as in Eliot's other novels, is essentially inactive.

This passivity is reflected in the behavior of all of the gentlemen in Daniel Deronda; even Sir Hugo, who is the most admirable of them, as his kindness and tolerance of differences in others indicate, is resistant to change of any kind. He is rather like Cardinal Newman's gentleman, whose good qualities are negative rather than positive, passive rather than active.[8] Though Sir Hugo is described as having written everything from "volumes of travel in the brilliant style, to articles on things in general, and pamphlets on political crises," none of his activities is described as having had any sort of influence on others. The reason for this is hinted at in a passage which refers to Sir Hugo as

> a Liberal of good lineage who confided entirely in Reform as not likely to make any serious difference in English habits of feeling, one of which undoubtedly is the liking to behold society well fenced and adorned with hereditary rank. (p. 864)

But though his rank is clearly important to him, he is described as being "the reverse of a straight-laced man" and as "leaving his dignity to take care of itself"

(p. 210). In addition, he feels the gentleman's sense of responsibility for those entrusted to his care, as his assumption of responsibility for Gwendolyn after her husband's death and his upbringing of Daniel indicate.

The gentleman's objectivity is suggested by the narrator's description of Sir Hugo as being "an easy-tempered man, tolerant of both differences and defects" (p. 196), and as having "an easy tolerance of eccentricities" (p. 224). This tolerance is demonstrated by the fact that he becomes a patron to some of Deronda's friends whom a less tolerant man might regard as being outside his class and, therefore, not worthy of his attention. He helps to advance Myra's career through his wife, and he employs Hans Meyrick to paint a portrait of his daughters. But none of these actions is likely to "make any serious difference in English habits of feeling." Like Sir Christopher in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," Sir Hugo bestows his patronage upon others without inquiring into their desires and needs. His motives in acting as he does are kind, but he never acts unless it is convenient for him to do so.

Sir Hugo is a gentleman very much of the type that is represented by Mr. Brooke in Middlemarch. In fact, he is a sort of superior Mr. Brooke who, though he does not pinch pennies, conceals his own selfishness and relative ignorance behind an apparent objectivity. Sir Hugo not only

resembles Brooke in that he uses Deronda as his political secretary much as Brooke uses Ladislaw; he even echoes Mr. Brooke's strictures against going "too far" in anything. When Deronda tells him he wants to go abroad to study, Sir Hugo says,

> "I have nothing to say against your doffing some of our national prejudices. I feel better myself for having spent a good deal of my time abroad. But, for God's sake, keep an English cut, and don't become indifferent to bad tobacco! And my dear boy, it is good to be unselfish and generous; but don't carry that too far. It will not do to give yourself to be melted down for the benefit of the tallow trade; you must know where to find yourself." (p. 224)

Sir Hugo does not mind if Deronda studies abroad as long as he remains a proper English gentleman and does not take up any foreign ideas too thoroughly.

At the same time, Sir Hugo advises Deronda against sacrificing his own self-interest to the needs of others, as Deronda had done when he helped Hans to study and failed to get his own degree. Similarly, Sir Hugo advises Deronda not to go too far in his studies; instead, he advises that Deronda need only learn as much as will help advance a career which Sir Hugo obviously hopes will be in politics. He says,

> "What I wish you to get is a passport in life. I don't go against our university system: we want a little disinterested culture to make head against

> cotton and capital, especially in the House. My Greek has all evaporated: if I had to construe a verse on a sudden, I should get an apoplectic fit. But it formed my taste. I daresay my English is the better for it." (p. 217)

Ironically, Sir Hugo extols the virtues of disinterestedness, a quality which he believes to be encouraged by a classical education, while at the same time he maintains that the only purpose of such an education is that it allows those who have had it to prevail politically over those who have not. In short, in Sir Hugo's view, the only reason for acquiring a smattering of "disinterested culture" is to advance one's own interests. Sir Hugo's simultaneous belief in two contradictory ideas is the kind of thinking which passes for reason in the world that he inhabits.

But such thinking actually reveals Sir Hugo's selfish desire to maintain things exactly as he finds them; it is a habit of thinking that he exhibits again during a discussion with Deronda and Grandcourt about whether one should restore old buildings such as those at the Abbey, Sir Hugo's estate. Sir Hugo says that he believes that "the rule of pocket is the best guide" (p. 470), but reveals that his greatest objection to restoration is the amount of activity required to accomplish it:

> "I wouldn't destroy any old bits, but that notion of reproducing the old is a mistake, I think. At least if a man likes to do it he must pay for his whistle. Besides, where are you to stop along that road--making loopholes where you don't want to peep, and so on? You may as well ask me to wear out the stones with kneeling; eh Grandcourt?" (p. 469-70)

Grandcourt's agreement that such an activity would be a "confounded nuisance" is definitely an indictment of Sir Hugo's attitude.

But even more damning is the condition of an old chapel that had been part of the original abbey acquired by the Mallingers from Henry VIII. The chapel is being used as a stable, and, though no "old bits" have been destroyed, the alterations required to make it habitable for horses have contributed to the destruction begun by troopers and the decay caused by time. The degradation of the church-turned-stable is not really an attempt on Sir Hugo's part to destroy what becomes in Eliot's description a symbol for the decline of valuable institutions from the past--in this case, the church. Rather, it indicates his unwillingness actively to restore the past. In this respect, Sir Hugo differs greatly from Sir Christopher Cheverel, who appears in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" and is in many ways Eliot's most admiring portrait of the gentleman. Sir Christopher sacrifices his own comfort to his effort to renovate his house in the Gothic style, and Eliot admires his devotion

to what she calls "that sublime spirit which distinguishes art from luxury, and worships beauty apart from self-indulgence."[9] Sir Hugo, on the other hand, simply accepts things the way they are and thereby allows decline to take place. Once the focal point for a united community, this church now has a merely utilitarian purpose, an effect brought about by Sir Hugo's gentlemanly lack of effort.

The effect of Sir Hugo's passive acceptance of things as they are is revealed most clearly in the way that Deronda suffers as a child because he is not told the truth about his own history. Sir Hugo is aware that everyone suspects that Deronda is his own son, but the narrator says that

> he was pleased with that suspicion; and his imagination had never once been troubled with the way in which the boy himself might be affected, either then or in the future by the enigmatic aspect of his circumstances. (p. 214)

Because he is absolutely convinced that the life of an English gentleman that he has provided for Deronda is the best life he could give him, it never occurs to him to question whether not knowing the truth is painful to him or whether in the future he might prefer to live as a Jew. What Deronda comes to think of as Sir Hugo's "ignorant kindness" actually has the "effect of cruelty," an effect produced by the fact that Deronda's own experience "had

been entirely shut out from Sir Hugo's conception" (p. 781).

This same lack of imagination about the feelings of others causes Sir Hugo to make a flippant remark which is painful to Deronda much later when they meet in Genoa. There Deronda has learned the truth about his parents and has also helped Gwendolyn after Grandcourt's death. When Deronda acknowledges that he stayed to help Gwendolyn in spite of the fact that he was anxious to get the strongbox his grandfather left for him, Sir Hugo remarks, "I hope you are not going to set a dead Jew above a live Christian" (p. 768).

Sir Hugo's absolute belief in the superiority of the English gentleman makes the effect of his actions very different from their intention. Though he intends to do what is best for Deronda, Sir Hugo's reluctance either to destroy the illusion that Deronda is his son or to reveal his birthright is much like his unwillingness to restore the past or to destroy it in the symbol of the stable, and it has the effect of tying Deronda to him while at the same time setting him apart. It also allows Sir Hugo to make use of Deronda, both in his personal life and in his role as a member of Parliament. Deronda seems to take care of much of Sir Hugo's business for him, from running down to Diplow to see if Grandcourt might consider selling his future interest in it or writing letters to some of the

voters in the district Sir Hugo represents in Parliament. Thus, Sir Hugo's kindness in bringing up Deronda has the effect of making life easier for himself; he is only unselfish insofar as it is convenient for him to be so. Even his acceptance of Deronda's decision to live as a Jew is not so much an indication of his tolerance of others' ways as it is a reflection of his unwillingness to exert himself to try to change Deronda's mind.

For Mr. Gascoigne, another of the gentlemen in Daniel Deronda, it is not quite as easy to be unselfish as it is for Sir Hugo. Gascoigne is far less well-heeled than Sir Hugo; in fact, he has always had to earn his living, first as a soldier and then as a clergyman, two of the professions considered appropriate for the gentleman during the Victorian period. As a result, all of Gascoigne's actions are far more carefully calculated than Sir Hugo's. Though he is not a member of the leisure class, his actions and opinions are determined by those who are, as this passage reveals:

> . . . the Rector maintained his cheerful confidence in the goodwill of patrons and his resolution to deserve it by the fulfillment of his duties, whether patrons were likely to hear of it or not, doing nothing solely with an eye to promotion except, perhaps, the writing of two ecclesiastical articles, which, having no signatures, were attributed to someone else, except by the patrons who had a special copy sent them, and these certainly knew the author but did not read the articles. (p. 772)

This passage suggests that the Rector fulfills his clerical duties in the same way that he fulfills his "obligation" to turn out a couple of ecclesiastical articles. He fulfills the letter if not the spirit of his duties by doing only what he must do in order to gain preferment. In introducing him to the reader, Eliot has the narrator defend him against the charge of being ill-prepared to be a clergyman simply by asking if any clergyman in the parish preached better or had more authority. This negative argument suggests that Mr. Gascoigne measures up to a rather low standard for clergymen by doing exactly what is expected of him by his patrons and nothing more. The charge that he is too worldly is not so easily refuted, as "it was not to be denied that the friendships he cultivated were of a kind likely to be useful to the father of six sons and two daughters" and that "the colour of his opinions had changed in consistency with this principle of action" (p. 60).

Gascoigne demonstrates this same worldliness in his role as advisor to Mrs. Davilow and Gwendolyn. When Gwendolyn says that she would like to have a horse, Gascoigne goes along with her wish because he believes that the "girl is really worth some expense" and might "make a first-rate marriage" (p. 66). Since Gwendolyn looks good on a horse, Gascoigne permits her to have one, believing

that it will help her attract a wealthy husband--calculations, according to the narrator, which "were of the kind called rational" (p. 68). Like Gascoigne's other actions, this one is taken with "an eye to promotion"; he does only those things that are in his own self-interest or the self-interest of members of his family, just as Sir Hugo does--indeed, as most of Eliot's gentlemen do.

Another quality that Gascoigne shares with other gentlemen in Eliot's novels is the fact that "in spite of his practical ability, some of his experience had petrified into maxims and quotations" (p. 95). Though he is described as being "tolerant of both opinions and conduct," he is so only because he feels "himself able to overrule them, and was free from the irritations of conscious feebleness" (p. 60). This belief in his own ability to "overrule" makes it unnecessary, according to his thinking, to observe Rex carefully enough to see that he is falling in love with Gwendolyn. Just as Sir Hugo fails to interpret what Deronda must be feeling about the uncertainty of his parentage, Gascoigne regards the "trivialities of the young ones with scarcely more interpretation than [he gives] to the actions of lively ants" (p. 97).

Mr. Gascoigne, like Sir Hugo, believes that there are absolute standards by which he must direct his conduct, and this belief has the same strengths and the same weaknesses

as Sir Hugo's. One of its strengths is that Mr. Gascoigne considers it his duty to accept responsibility for Mrs. Davilow and her children after the loss of their fortune, though his acceptance of the responsibility makes his life and his family's more difficult. But this same sense of duty to one's family had earlier led Gascoigne to urge Gwendolyn to marry Grandcourt. He tells Gwendolyn that she may never get another opportunity to make such a good marriage and that she should consider the benefits to her family as well as to herself:

> ". . . you hold your fortune in your own hands--a fortune such as rarely happens to a girl in your circumstances--a fortune in fact which almost takes the question out of the range of mere personal feeling, and makes your acceptance of it a duty. If providence offers you power and position--especially when unclogged by any conditions that are repugnant to you--your course is one of responsibility, into which caprice must not enter." (pp. 178-79)

Gascoigne makes a strictly rational, eminently practical argument here, and uses not only the promise of position but the promise of power to urge Gwendolyn to accept Grandcourt. The passage reveals the way that he defines duty; he sees Gwendolyn's potential marriage as a social duty, not as a moral duty. Indeed, moral questions are of no importance since to Gascoigne "aristocratic heirship resembled regal heirship in excepting its possessor from

the ordinary standard of moral judgments" (p. 176). By this he means that

> Grandcourt, the almost certain baronet, the probable peer, was to be ranged with public personages and was a match to be accepted on broad general grounds national and ecclesiastical.[10] (p. 177)

Though he has heard rumors about Mrs. Glasher and her children, Gascoigne's belief that the marriage would be advantageous for Gwendolyn is not altered by them. Gascoigne sees himself as the purveyor of practical wisdom and authority, and Gwendolyn accepts him as such. But actually he simply reinforces Gwendolyn's already selfish motives and her desire for power by giving them the official sanction of the good opinion of society.

The gentleman's selfishness, his desire to control others, and particularly his passivity are presented in their most extreme form in the person of Henleigh Grandcourt; in fact, Eliot describes Grandcourt as representing "the extreme type of the national taste" (p. 467). Grandcourt's importance, as the narrator says, is of "the grandly passive kind which consists in the inheritance of land" (p. 644). Gwendolyn approves of Grandcourt because he is not ridiculous, and he is not ridiculous because he does nothing. In Grandcourt, the gentleman's objectivity is nothing more than a "neutral loftiness" (p. 609), which

is revealed by his boredom with anything that resembles passionate interest or activity. For this reason he objects to Klesmer, whose passionate devotion to music makes him a figure of ridicule. Grandcourt is an example of what Eliot calls "the English gentleman pure" who "objects to looking inspired in any way" (p. 135). Though Grandcourt does nothing, he seems everything:

> . . . a man may make a good appearance in a high social position--may be supposed to know the classics, to have his reserves on science, a strong though repressed opinion on politics, and all the sentiments of the English gentleman at a small expense of vital energy. (p. 194)

Indeed, Grandcourt is completely free of the kind of feelings that motivate the activity demanded by Eliot's feminine ideal:

> Grandcourt's passions were of the intermittent, flickering kind: never flaming out strongly. But a great deal of life goes on without strong passions: myriads of cravats are carefully tied, dinners attended, even speeches made proposing the health of august personages, without the zest arising from a strong desire. (p. 194)

Eliot also emphasizes Grandcourt's cold-bloodedness by comparing him to a lizard and other "sleepy-eyed animal[s] on the watch for prey" (p. 465). Like a reptilian creature, Grandcourt is inactive himself, but he is always watching others, as a reptile watches its prey, to detect

any weakness on their part.

But Grandcourt's inactivity is even greater than a reptile's; he cannot even be bothered to make a kill himself, but as a gentleman employs others to do it for him. Specifically, he employs Lush, whom Sir Hugo describes as a half-caste gentleman, because "he never did choose to kick any animal, because the act of kicking is a compromising attitude, and a gentleman's dogs should be kicked for him" (p. 165). Though this passage refers to the fact that one of Lush's duties is literally to kick Grandcourt's dogs, Lush also performs the same function with regard to people. When Grandcourt wants to make Gwendolyn aware of the will which favors Mrs. Glasher and her children, he has Lush inform her of the details.

Grandcourt's extreme cold-bloodedness would not be as destructive a quality were it not combined with a desire to control others absolutely. The gentleman's belief in absolute standards and the will to impose them are, in men like Sir Hugo and Mr. Gascoigne, motivated by the desire to do what is best for the people for whom they feel responsible. While their cruelty is not deliberate, Grandcourt's is. As Jerome Thale points out, Grandcourt's desire for absolute mastery over others introduces a new tone into Eliot's work, a new "concern with the sinister and the malign."[11] Unlike her other gentlemen, Grandcourt takes a

sadistic pleasure in exerting power over others, as this description of his feelings after Gwendolyn accepts his proposal indicates:

> She had been brought to accept him in spite of everything--brought to kneel down like a horse under training for the arena, though she might have an objection to it all the while. On the whole, Grandcourt got more pleasure out of this notion than he could have done out of winning a girl of whom he was sure that she had a strong preference for him personally. (p. 365)

This comparison of Gwendolyn to a horse ties his pleasure in subduing her to riding, one of the traditional occupations of the gentleman. It also reminds one of a conversation Grandcourt had earlier with Sir Hugo when he asked how a gentleman is to occupy his time if he does not keep a good stable.

Like riding, marriage to Gwendolyn is simply another amusement that Grandcourt has taken up, one that provides more sadistic pleasure than the passionate devotion of Mrs. Glasher had done. As the narrator says, it "had really brought him more of aim into his life, new objects to exert his will upon; and he had not repented of his choice" (p. 645). Thus, instead of being dismayed when Gwendolyn receives the letter from Mrs. Glasher which tells her that the jewels she is to have had once belonged to Mrs. Glasher herself, Grandcourt is pleased since he

believes that what she has learned will give him greater power over Gwendolyn. Grandcourt exerts his will by maintaining his own complete impassibility in the face of Gwendolyn's passionate feelings, as when he responds to her tears while they are in Genoa by saying that he cannot see what use there is in them. Grandcourt is described as having "no imagination of anything in her but what affected the gratification of his own will"; and he has completely suppressed the emotions that would make any other response possible.

Grandcourt's sadistic behavior is, as Thale says, sinister and malign, but it is actually less alarming than the fact that society seems to approve of it, or at least to tolerate it. Though Grandcourt's past is a frequent topic of conversation in aristocratic society, people assume that he has reformed since "reformation where a man can afford to do without it, can hardly be other than genuine" (pp. 125-26). Because Grandcourt is the consummate gentleman in appearance, other gentlemen accept him as what he seems to be; in effect, the characteristic passivity of the gentleman prevents them from trying to find out if Grandcourt is really what he seems. Gascoigne, for example, though he has heard the gossip about Grandcourt, does not consider what he has heard when he considers Grandcourt as a husband for Gwendolyn. Thus, he advises

her to become engaged to Grandcourt after she has known him for only a few weeks.

An even more cynical interpretation of society's attitude to Grandcourt is suggested in the narrator's reference to how Grandcourt might have performed as governor of a colony:

> If this white-handed man with the perpendicular profile had been sent to govern a difficult colony, he might have won reputation among his contemporaries. He had certainly ability, would have understood that it was safer to exterminate than to cajole superseded proprietors, and would not have flinched from making things safe in that way. (p. 655)

This passage suggests that the will to control others can be useful to society, as it is just such a will that makes colonization possible. Grandcourt's behavior, though it is the "extreme type of the national taste," includes qualities of which English society wholeheartedly approves. It is this fact that leads Henry James to call Eliot's portrait of Grandcourt "a consummate portrayal of English brutality refined and distilled."[12] Behind Grandcourt's actions lies the "spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness" that Eliot describes in her letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, and it is the effects of such a "spirit" that she is trying to reveal in Daniel Deronda.

One of these effects is that young women such as Gwendolyn, instead of acquiring the feminine quality of self-sacrifice and the ability to influence others, have actually acquired the gentleman's selfishness and desire his power. Gwendolyn, like Grandcourt, is convinced of her own superiority to others and possessed of what the narrator describes as "a piteous equality in the need to dominate" (p. 346). The comparison to Grandcourt is enhanced by the fact that she too is often compared to a reptile, in her case to a snake. Gwendolyn's need to dominate expresses itself as a desire, as she describes it, to take up the reins of the chariot that is her own life and "conquer circumstances by her own exceptional cleverness" (p. 69).

Gwendolyn feels the need to dominate in spite of the fact that a feminine education like hers is supposed to produce an "angel in the house." Eliot's rejection of this ideal is not only implied in Gwendolyn's story but explicitly stated in this comparison of Gwendolyn to her "male contemporaries": "Because her education had been less expensive than theirs, it did not follow that she should have wider emotions or a keener intellectual vision" (p. 321). But wider emotions and keener vision than a man's are exactly the qualities that Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House" suggests that women inevitably

possess.[13] Actually, though Gwendolyn's education was less extensive than a male's, consisting as it did chiefly of the study of music, French, and manners, it resembles the male's education in that it leaves Gwendolyn with a set of "unexplained rules and disconnected facts which saves ignorance from any painful sense of limpness" (p. 70). Gwendolyn's poor education is a factor in her choosing to marry Grandcourt rather than be a governess. And her story reflects Eliot's concern with the education of women, a concern that dates from her interest in Aimé-Martin's The Education of Mothers.[14] Until Gwendolyn's family loses its money, the inadequacy of her education does not reveal itself, but after the loss the narrator remarks that her "uncontrolled reading, though consisting chiefly in what are called pictures of life, had somehow not prepared her for this encounter with reality" (p. 193).

Like the gentleman, Gwendolyn relies on maxims to determine her thinking and actions; in fact, at the beginning of the novel she relies on her own "key to life" which is "doing as she likes" (p. 73). Thus Gwendolyn does not consider it her duty to do anything unpleasant or anything which demands an effort on her part, such as helping to save money by teaching her sisters or even considering the feelings of her mother. According to the narrator, she is like a

> very common sort of men who combine a strong determination to have what was pleasant, with a total fearlessness in making themselves disagreeable when they did not get it. (p. 71)

This statement exactly describes the position that Gwendolyn occupies in her mother's household. But Gwendolyn is actually typical of what Eliza Lynn Linton called "The Girl of the Period," and as Bonnie Zimmerman has shown, she represents "a mass of uninformed, bored, easily-swayed women" who had adopted the "mercenary air of the high Victorian age."[15] According to Zimmerman, there were many young women like Gwendolyn who had rejected the moral values implied in the ideal of the "angel in the house" without replacing them with a new set of values. Before she comes under the influence of Deronda, Gwendolyn, like Tito in Romola, is motivated simply by the love of pleasure.

Gwendolyn demonstrates her mercenary nature most clearly when she rationalizes away her doubts about marrying Grandcourt. When Mr. Gascoigne advises her of her "duty" to marry Grandcourt, she startles him with a bald recital of his true meaning instead of expressing herself in "sentiments proper to a girl" (p. 179). She says,

> "I am not foolish. I know that I must be married some-time--before it is too late. And I don't see how I could do better than marry Mr. Grandcourt. I mean to accept him, if possible." (p. 179)

Furthermore, after she knows about Mrs. Glasher and decides to marry Grandcourt anyway, she is described as drawing on all her knowledge to justify her essentially selfish decision. Drawing on all her "knowledge" consists simply of her rationalization that since society does not disapprove of the way that Grandcourt has treated Mrs. Glasher, her own feeling of moral repulsion must be wrong. She also convinces herself that she will be helping her mother and sisters, but her greatest rationalization is that she will be able to influence Grandcourt to treat Mrs. Glasher and the children better. In effect, Gwendolyn accepts society's maxim that a woman inevitably has a great influence over her husband, though a realistic look at the sort of man Grandcourt is should tell anyone that such an influence would be impossible.

Gwendolyn's rationalizations, like Tito's in Romola, are eventually revealed as exactly what they are, a device she uses in order to justify doing what she wants to do. Gwendolyn also resembles Tito in that she is a gambler, as the opening scene in the casino indicates. Like Tito who regards his actions in juggling the various parties he claims to support as a game of chance and skill, she comes to see marriage to Grandcourt as her last chance to "conquer circumstances by her exceptional cleverness" (p. 69). And, again, she has the behavior of gentlemen as her model.

It was just such a reliance on the chance that they might make a great deal of money which caused the gentlemen who handled her mother's money to lose it. Only after Gwendolyn comes to realize that she has "sold herself and had been paid the strict price" (p. 733) does she learn to regard her marriage as her "last great gambling loss" (p. 496) in which the "losing was not simply a minus, but a terrible plus that had never entered into her reckoning" (p. 659).

Despite the fact that Gwendolyn's experience teaches her that "general maxims" like the Rector's absolute belief in a wife's ability to influence her husband are "of a precarious usefulness" (p. 611), she continues to act as Eliot's gentlemen habitually act. In fact, she conforms to the gentlemanly code, as Eliot portrays it, by not acting at all. Though she feels a moral repulsion for Grandcourt, she throws all her energy into behaving as others expect her to behave in her exalted position. Gwendolyn is determined not to "give way" (p. 609) to her feelings, as she had been determined not to show her despair upon the loss of her mother's money. Because she dreads both the admission that she broke her word to Mrs. Glasher in marrying Grandcourt and the possibility that her own fate would be much like Mrs. Glasher's if she were to leave her husband, she feels that she can do nothing but submit to

the life she has chosen for herself:

> . . . what she submitted to could not take the shape of duty, but was submission to a yoke drawn on her by an action she was ashamed of, and worn with a strength of selfish motives that left no weight for duty to carry. (p. 617)

Gwendolyn's behavior, like Grandcourt's own, is selfishly motivated, and Deronda notices the results of this selfishness when he sees a "hardening in her look and manner" (p. 667) which he attributes to the suppression of her feelings.

Gwendolyn is becoming remarkably similar to Grandcourt himself, as is indicated by the response of the people in Genoa who watch as the pair walks to the boat from which Grandcourt will fall and drown:

> This handsome, fair-skinned couple manifesting the usual eccentricity of their nation, both of them proud, pale, and calm, without a smile on their faces, moving like creatures who were fulfilling a supernatural destiny--it was a thing to see, a thing to paint. (p. 745)

Like Grandcourt, Gwendolyn has come to epitomize the "extreme of the national taste," as the reference to them as "a thing to paint" indicates. They are less like human beings than they are like a work of art; in fact, they are rather like one of the tableaux that Gwendolyn had produced at Offendene.

But Gwendolyn is not only as apparently cold and proud as Grandcourt; she is also potentially as cruel. For, as the reader later learns, when Gwendolyn is walking to the boat, her mind is occupied with thoughts she has had for some time--most importantly with her belief that the only escape from her marriage is Grandcourt's death. In fact, she fears that she may be tempted to kill him while they are out in the sailboat. Eliot uses both of the Grandcourts to suggest how destructive the gentleman's selfishness and his power over others can be when they are combined and carried to their extreme limits.

The only glimpses given to Gwendolyn of a world outside the world of the gentleman come from Daniel Deronda, the chief representative in the novel of Eliot's feminine ideal, and Deronda influences Gwendolyn in the way the ideal requires. Deronda warns Gwendolyn from the first against the kind of absence of passion which is Grandcourt's most obvious quality, telling her that she must find some interest that fills her with "passionate delight" so that she can become "conscious of more beyond the round of [her] own inclinations" (p. 508). More importantly, he tells her to use her remorse for having betrayed Mrs. Glasher to prevent her from acting again in a way that would hurt others. And it is her dread at "the idea of increasing that remorse" (p. 509), of gaining

because of another's loss, that prevents Gwendolyn from refraining froom acting to save Grandcourt. What Deronda is really warning Gwendolyn against is her desire to exert absolute control over another, which is what she did when she married Grandcourt, knowing that he had a prior obligation to Mrs. Glasher.

Deronda is able to warn Gwendolyn against trying to control another person's life because of his own experience. He is aware of the consequences of such an action since his mother had attempted to determine his life, just as his grandfather had attempted to determine hers by trying to force her to be a good Jewish wife instead of a singer. Significantly, Deronda feels a greater sympathy for Gwendolyn after he meets his mother, for her life provides him with a picture of what Gwendolyn's life might become if he cannot help her. Deronda's influence on Gwendolyn is that of a "terrible-browed angel" (p. 737), an image that is very different from the mild "angel in the house." He plays a role in Gwendolyn's life that one might expect to be played by her family or by the church. But her family has already proved to be of no help. Her uncle is too worldly, and her mother shrinks from discussing anything unpleasant with her. Gwendolyn can get no help from religion either, since she regards the church as one of many "unexplained and perhaps inexplicable social

fashions" (p. 666).

Gwendolyn comes to rely completely on Deronda as a moral authority, and this influence begins at the gaming tables where she realizes that he has a standard to which she does not measure up. The narrator describes Deronda's judgment of Gwendolyn as having "wakened something like a new soul" (p. 378) in her and refers to his role in Gwendolyn's life in Feuerbachian terms: "our brother may be in the stead of God to us, and his opinion which has pierced even to the joints and marrow, may be our virtue n the making" (p. 833).

Deronda has the same sort of positive influence on Gwendolyn that Dorothea has on Will in Middlemarch, as this passage makes clear: "in some mysterious way he was becoming a part of her conscience, as one woman whose nature is an object of reverential belief may become a new conscience to a man" (p. 468). Just as Dorothea influences Will to abandon his dilettantism and to become involved in the cause of reform, Deronda attempts to influence Gwendolyn to adopt what he calls "the religious life, which holds an enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities" (pp. 507-08). Deronda wants to teach Gwendolyn to feel the kind of passionate devotion to something outside herself that he has come to feel for Judaism. Clearly, Eliot is associating Deronda's effect on Gwendolyn

with the Victorians' belief in feminine influence, the same convictions that make Gascoigne suggest that Gwendolyn should try to influence Grandcourt to enter politics.

But traditional notions about feminine influence are not necessarily valid, as Gwendolyn's experience reveals. There are too many possible impediments to the realizations of the ideal of the "angel in the house." A wife may be incapable of such influence, or a husband may resist it. While Eliot offers an alternative to the ideal of the gentleman in the character of Deronda, she also offers an alternative to the generally accepted view of feminine influence. By making Deronda the representative of her feminine ideal, she argues that the qualities of self-sacrifice and the ability to influence others for good should not be regarded strictly as belonging to women. According to Eliot, these qualities should be shared equally by men and women.

In Eliot's description of him, Daniel Deronda is from the first distinguished from the gentlemen in the novel, particularly from Grandcourt; the "calm intensity of life and richness of tint in his face" contrast sharply with Grandcourt's impassive countenance and hint at still greater differences between them. While Grandcourt is selfish, passive, and cruel, Deronda is self-sacrificing and active on behalf of others. This difference arises

from the fact that Deronda's early life is described as setting him apart from other boys, which results in "the same blending of child's ignorance blent with surprising knowledge which is oftener seen in bright girls" (p. 204). Eliot implies that Deronda's position as the supposed son of Sir Hugo--a situation which makes him a member of the family but which also denies him the rights that a legitimate son would have--is very similar to that of a daughter. One is reminded of Maggie's position in the Tulliver family in The Mill on the Floss; she is a bright girl whose cleverness is considered surprising. And she, too, is denied the rights that her brother Tom has--in her case the right to the approximation of a gentleman's education. Deronda's case is very different, of course, since he is not denied such an education. Instead of developing Maggie's rebelliousness, he develops a great sympathy for others as a result of his deep concern for the mother he never knew. In fact, he develops a "special interest in the fates of women." When he feels an interest in Myra just before she tries to drown herself, he thinks, "'perhaps my mother was like this one'" (p. 231).

This special interest develops into "a hatred of all injury," and Deronda is said to have

> a subdued fervour of sympathy, activity of imagination on behalf of others, which did not show

> itself effusively, but was continually seen in acts of consideration that struck his companions as moral eccentricity. (p. 318)

Eliot makes a distinction between Deronda's unselfish activity and the more passive selfishness of other boys when she describes Deronda as spending a "good deal of energy in disliking and resisting what others pursue," and she goes on to say that "a boy who is fond of somebody else's pencil-case may not be more energetic than another who is fond of giving his pencil-case away" (p. 219). As usual, the novelist suggests the active nature of Deronda's "feminine" self-sacrifice and contrasts it with the passivity of the boy who is merely fond of another's pencil case.

Deronda is also distinguished from the gentleman by the fact that he does not have an absolute belief in "maxims and quotations." While at Cambridge, Deronda becomes bored with his studies because he feels a heightening discontent with the

> wearing futility and enfeebling strain of a demand for excessive retention and dexterity without any insight into the principles which form the vital connections of knowledge. (p. 220)

This discontent leads him to sacrifice his own studies in order to help Hans Meyrick study for his examinations, doing so because he is aware that Meyrick needs the degree more than Deronda does, as he wants to be able to help his

mother and sisters financially. Even after he decides to live as a Jew, Deronda retains this same skepticism. He does not accept all of his grandfather's absolute beliefs any more than he accepted the maxims of the gentleman. He tells the man from whom he gets his grandfather's papers that he will not promise to believe exactly as his grandfather believed, perhaps remembering his grandfather's unreasonable demands on his mother. Deronda will not even promise to do exactly as Mordecai asks, refusing to promise to take credit for Mordecai's writing.

A less obvious but more thoroughly human example of Deronda's more "active" sympathy is the desire he expresses at one point to horsewhip Grandcourt. Eliot clearly intends for Deronda's violent wish to develop the contrast between him and Grandcourt, suggesting as it does Deronda's passion as opposed to Grandcourt's cold-bloodedness. But since this is the only occasion when Deronda expresses such a feeling, it does little to mitigate the impression that Deronda, as Henry James says, is "rather priggish."[16] In the character of Deronda, Eliot fails to suggest the passion that lies behind his active self-sacrifice, as she did so successfully in the character of Dorothea.

In addition to the "feminine" qualities of self-sacrifice and the ability to have a positive influence on others, Deronda also possesses others usually associated

with the gentleman. The narrator says that there is a

> mental balance in Deronda, who was moved by an affectionateness such as we are apt to call feminine, disposing him to yield in ordinary details, while he had a certain inflexibility of judgment, an independence of opinion, held to be rightly masculine. (p. 367)

The independence of opinion referred to here is the disinterestedness associated with the gentlemanly ideal. But Deronda's disinterestedness is quite different from the spurious objectivity of most of Eliot's gentlemen. When he advises Gwendolyn, Deronda echoes Matthew Arnold's admonition in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," telling her that she must attempt "to care for what is best in thought and action" (p. 502).

Deronda follows his own advice when he acknowledges the value of Mordecai's theories, an admission that would be impossible for one of Eliot's gentlemen. Sir Hugo, for example, could never do so, believing as he does in the superiority of everything English to everything foreign. Deronda's disinterestedness is a true disinterestedness, while Sir Hugo is merely tolerant. Deronda reveals his awareness of the flaw in Sir Hugo's beliefs during the discussion of the restoration of old buildings like the Abbey. He says that to "delight in doing things because our fathers did them is good if it shuts out nothing

better" (p. 470).

Nevertheless, Deronda has acquired his objectivity from his upbringing as an English gentleman, as he indicates when he acknowledges the good of the education his mother arranged for him. Deronda's understanding of the limitations of Sir Hugo's version of the ideal of the gentleman and his belief in the value of a real disinterestedness are revealed by a remark he makes in denial of Sir Hugo's assumption that, because he wants to study abroad, he no longer wants to be an Englishman. Deronda says, "'I want to be an Englishman, but I want to understand other points of view'" (p. 224).

Deronda's "feminine" sympathy for Gwendolyn makes him sacrifice his own greater interests when he takes time to advise her, while his gentleman's objectivity makes it possible for him to make her aware that there is a larger world than the one in which she has been living. Deronda's desire to understand other points of view recalls Eliot's belief that the typical Englishman is unable to "find interest in any form of life that is not clad in the same coat-tails and flounces as [his] own."[17] In effect, Eliot is suggesting that English society needs to be made aware that there are other worlds outside the Englishman's narrow one and other values that may be as valid as the Englishman's.

This awareness of other worlds and other values is exactly the knowledge that Deronda brings to Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn is said to have believed "from childhood, that whatever surrounded her was somehow specially for her" (p. 876), and she cannot imagine that there are any other claims on Deronda or any other sort of life than the one she knows. But Deronda destroys all these illusions by telling her that he has discovered that he is a Jew and plans to travel in the East in order to help create a homeland for the Jews. Deronda's revelation makes Gwendolyn aware not only that there are other ways of life than the one with which she is familiar; it also reveals that there are things that are more important than her own personal happiness. Eliot describes the crisis that occurs in Gwendolyn's life in this way:

> There comes a terrible moment to many souls when the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind, which have lain aloof in newspapers and other neglected reading, enter like an earthquake into their own lives--when the slow urgency of growing generations turns into the tread of an invading army or the dire clash of civil war, and grey fathers know nothing to seek for but the corpses of their blooming sons, and girls forget all vanity to make lint and bandages which may serve for the shattered limbs of their betrothed husbands. (p. 875)

Eliot is comparing the change that takes place in Gwendolyn's life as a result of Deronda's revelation to

that which took place in the lives of girls like her during the American Civil War. In effect, Gwendolyn is made to see that she will be compelled to sacrifice her own need for Deronda's counsel and her love for him to his more important purpose. Though she does not fully understand his goals she believes that they must be valuable because she believes in him. Furthermore, Gwendolyn's assurance in her letter to Deronda that she will be better for having known him suggests that she will at least attempt to understand the larger world and live a less selfish life. Deronda achieves the purpose in his influence on Gwendolyn that Eliot describes as having been her purpose in writing the novel: that Daniel Deronda would "rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow-men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs."[18]

But Deronda is unable to bring this same vision to English society as a whole, and his failure indicates Eliot's awareness of the dangers of what she calls "a too reflective and diffusive sympathy" (p. 413). This sympathy allows Deronda to influence individuals but not society as a whole. Though he sees the flaws in Sir Hugo's gentlemanly attitudes, Deronda does not feel able to work actively for change because of his affection for Sir Hugo and the tradition he represents. Deronda is prevented from

acting by what David Carroll calls a "disease of sympathy."[19] As the narrator says, Deronda's undirected sympathy "was in danger of paralyzing in him that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force" (p. 413). The same sympathy that motivates him to help Gwendolyn prevents him from acting to change the flaws in English society--flaws which are represented in the person of Sir Hugo, whom he loves but does not unreservedly admire. Deronda is able to condemn the things in general that he disapproves of in English society, but he inevitably forgives those same things in Sir Hugo. Eliot describes Deronda's problem in this way:

> Few men were able to keep themselves clearer of vices than he; yet he hated vices mildly, being used to think of them less in the abstract than as a part of mixed human natures having an individual history, which it was the bent of his mind to trace with understanding and pity. With the same innate balance he was fervidly democratic in his feeling for the multitude, and yet, through his affections and imagination, intensely conservative; voracious of speculations on government and religion, yet loath to part with long-sanctioned forms which, for him, were quick with memories and sentiments that no argument could lay dead. (pp. 412-13)

Here Eliot describes the values which she has always strongly believed in, the conservative-reforming tendencies of her thinking. But though, like Deronda she recognizes

the flaws in English society, she, again like Deronda, has too much affection for particular aspects of English life to advocate any sweeping reforms which might destroy them. As U. C. Knoepflmacher points out, Deronda's inability to act reflects Eliot's doubts about her own humanistic ideals, and reveals her "realization that her era's acceptance of the new progressive theories had brought with it a paradoxical weakening of values and convictions."[20] Though Deronda does not share the gentleman's devotion to absolute standards, he is in danger of preventing change, just as the gentleman does, because of his inability to commit himself to any course of action.

Deronda's dilemma reflects Eliot's concern with the question of how sympathy is to be combined with authority, understanding with judgment, and how ideal hopes are to be realized in the context of the real world. The answer that Eliot offers in this novel is very different from the one she gives in Romola and Middlemarch. Deronda does not find his personal solution in working for slow reform, as Will and Dorothea do in Middlemarch because he fears that he might "mistake his own success for public expediency" (p. 435). He does not want to take on a task in which he might be forced to make compromises. Instead, he longs for "some ideal task" which will come to him "as a duty, and not be striven for as a personal prize" (p. 819), and Eliot

obliges him with the heroic role of the Jewish Messiah. His task of attempting to establish a Jewish homeland makes it possible for him to feel an unalloyed reverence for the past while at the same time it provides him with the duty of reform in the present. Judaism, as Mordecai conceives of it, is "the heart of mankind" (p. 590), and he believes that what is good for the Jewish nation also "promises good to all nations" (p. 597). By assuming the role of Messiah, Deronda hopes to influence individuals, as he influences Gwendolyn, through the power of Mordecai's ideas.

Eliot is, in fact, making things easy for Deronda since, as Thomas Pinney points out,

> . . . he is allowed to have preferences and affections, but the danger that such things will result in narrow exclusiveness is neutralized by assigning him the widest possible reference--he will serve a whole race.[21]

Eliot also saves Deronda from the sort of renunciation that takes place in her Spanish Gypsy, in which the gypsy Fedalma must abandon the man she loves in order to fulfill her duty to try to establish a home for her people.[22] Deronda is able to blend "personal love . . . with a larger duty" by his marriage to Myra. Similarly, he has no real responsibilities to anyone in England that will prevent his taking up his task, since even his obligation to Gwendolyn is fulfilled by the very fact of his departure. Eliot

would only allow someone in Deronda's unique position to take on the epic role that he does, but her solution to Deronda's dilemma of a too-ready sympathy is unsatisfactory. Deronda's assumption of an heroic role is not proof of a growing optimism on Eliot's part, as some early critics suggest. Rather, it is pessimistic since it implies not only that it is unlikely that others, particularly the English characters, will be able to do what Deronda does but also that the kind of alternative that Will and Dorothea find in Middlemarch is impossible.

But there are indications in Daniel Deronda that Eliot believes that there is another way of influencing society as a whole, and that alternative is employed by Eliot herself. In fact, the novel is Eliot's attempt to bring her readers the same knowledge Deronda brings to Gwendolyn; she is trying to rouse their imagination about people who "differ from them in custom and belief," as she says in her letter to Stowe. Her belief that it is possible for an artist to affect the thinking, even the political beliefs, of individuals is supported by remarks that Klesmer, the composer, makes during a talk with Mr. Bult, a member of Parliament:

> "A creative artist is no more a mere musician than a great statesman is a mere politician. We are not ingenious puppets, sir, who live in a box and look out on the world only when it is gaping for amuse-

> ment. We help to rule the nations and make the age as much as any other public men. We count ourselves on level benches with legislators." (p. 284)

This remark, which resembles Shelley's argument that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world, reflects Eliot's belief that it is the artist's duty to teach as well as to entertain. But, more importantly, it reveals her purpose in writing the novel. Eliot continues to believe that the only way to change a society is to change the attitudes of individual members of that society. And, although the text of the novel indicates that she no longer believes in the possibility of bringing about the kind of slow progress through political action that she describes in Middlemarch, the novel itself is her attempt to effect a change by changing the attitudes of her readers. In Daniel Deronda Eliot seems to suggest that art is the only way of effecting change.

By including what has come to be known as the Jewish element in Daniel Deronda, Eliot hoped to influence her readers' thinking about the Jews. Unfortunately, in her attempt to throw as favorable a light as possible on Judaism, she portrays the Jewish characters as being far too ideal, particularly in comparison to the English. Though she intends to provide her readers with a picture of reality that will change their views, she fails to do so

because she succumbs to the temptation to use ideal characters to accomplish her purpose. However, the realistic way in which Eliot portrays the English characters allows her to accomplish her purpose, at least in part. The gentleman's "arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness," which she described in the letter to Stowe as the Englishman's attitude to the Jews, are revealed in the novel to be his attitude to anyone or anything that does not conform to the absolute standards in which he believes. More importantly, although the portrait of the Jews is flawed, Eliot is able to suggest the value of her feminine ideal by the influence that Deronda has on Gwendolyn.

Notes

[1] F. R. Leavis, "George Eliot," in A Century of George Eliot Criticism, ed. Gordon Haight (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 246.

[2] R. E. Francillon, review, Gentleman's Magazine, in George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, ed. David Carroll (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 383.

[3] Gordon Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), VI, 336.

[4] Edward Dowden, "Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda," in A Century of George Eliot Criticism, ed. George Haight (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 114.

[5] Haight, Letters, VI, 301.

[6] Haight, Letters, VI, 302.

[7] George Eliot, Daniel Deronda (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 104. Hereafter, references to the novel will be given in the text.

[8] John Henry Cardinal Newman, The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), p. 208.

[9] George Eliot, "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," in Scenes of Clerical Life, ed. David Lodge (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 159.

[10] Though Eliot suggests that Gascoigne's willingness to accept Grandcourt is due to the fact that his "father had risen to be a provencial corn dealer," Sir Hugo's thinking does not differ from Gascoigne's, as he advises the Rector after Grandcourt's death that he should have insisted on a better settlement for Gwendolyn in the event of Grandcourt's death.

[11] Jerome Thale, The Novels of George Eliot (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 125.

[12] Henry James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," in George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. George R. Creeger (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 166.

[13] Coventry Patmore, "The Angel in the House," in Poems by Coventry Patmore, introd. Basil Champneys (London: George Bell and Sons, 1906), p. 31.

[14] Haight, Letters, I, 66.

[15] Bonnie Zimmerman, "Gwendolyn Harleth and 'The Girl of the Period,'" in George Eliot: Centenary Essays and an Unpublished Fragment, ed. Anne Smith (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Press, 1980), pp. 201, 207.

[16] Henry James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," p. 168.

[17] Haight, Letters, VI, 302.

[18] Haight, Letters, VI, 301.

[19] David Carroll, "The Unity of Daniel Deronda" Essays in Criticism, IX, October (1959), 373.

[20] U. C. Knoepflmacher, Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel: George Eliot, Walter Pater, and Samuel Butler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 136.

[21] Thomas Pinney, "The Authority of the Past in George Eliot's Novels," in George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. George R. Creeger (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 53.

[22] George Eliot, The Spanish Gypsy, in Poetical Works (New York: A. L. Burt, n.d.), p. 145.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

Though the subject and scope of each of her novels is very different, Eliot retains the same moral vision throughout her career as a novelist. The reader who is familiar with all of her work is not surprised to find that Daniel Deronda has the same sort of self-sacrificing nature as the Rev. Tryon in "Janet's Repentance" or that both of them exert the same kind of beneficial influence on others. These characters, along with Dolly Winthrop in Silas Marner, the title character in Romola, Dorothea in Middlemarch, and others, represent Eliot's attempts to embody what I have called her feminine ideal since it includes qualities which most Victorians believed to be feminine. Only by examining these characters can the reader come to understand the moral values that are implied in the novels.

From the first, Eliot draws a distinction between those characters who embody her feminine ideal and the gentleman, who was a more widely accepted role model during the nineteenth century. Most Victorian novelists regarded the gentleman as, in Robin Gilmour's phrase, "a mirror of desirable moral and social values,"[1] but Eliot proposes a

new standard by which the individual should be judged. In fact, she suggests that the qualities that the gentleman values most, such as his objectivity, tend to make him resistant to change and that, like Cardinal Newman's gentleman in The Idea of a University, he is essentially passive rather than active. In contrast, those characters who embody Eliot's feminine ideal are active on behalf of others as well as being more open to change. Furthermore, Eliot herself hopes, through her work, to be able to have the sort of effect on her readers that her most admirable characters have on others in the novels, as this remark in one of her letters makes clear: "It is my function as an artist to act (if possible) for good on the emotions and conceptions of my fellow-men."[2]

But though Eliot's moral vision remains the same in all her novels, her attitude about how effective that moral vision can be in bringing about the kind of change her feminine ideal requires does alter. She is, for example, far more optimistic about the possibility that one individual can influence another as her ideal requires than she is about the possibility that a single individual can accomplish any sort of sweeping social or political change. In fact, it is possible to divide her work into two parts according to this distinction; the early novels up to Silas Marner suggest that those who embody Eliot's feminine ideal

can be wholly successful in achieving the kind of beneficial influence on others that the ideal requires. But in her later novels, beginning with Romola, Eliot begins to examine the ability of an individual to achieve the same kind of influence on a society as a whole that one individual can have on another, and she is not nearly as optimistic about the possibility of accomplishing this purpose.

In Scenes of Clerical Life and Silas Marner, Eliot not only suggests through the characters of Rev. Tryon, Dolly Winthrop, and Silas Marner that an individual can have a beneficial influence on another; she also establishes the fact that she evaluates both men and women in terms of her feminine ideal. Even more importantly, she suggests that it is an individual's own experience of suffering that makes it possible for him to exert the kind of influence her ideal requires; Rev. Tryon of "Janet's Repentance" is able to influence Janet Dempster only because he himself has suffered a similar feeling of despair. In Silas Marner Dolly Winthrop has the same sort of profound influence on the life of Silas that Tryon has on Janet, and Silas in turn has a beneficial influence on Eppie's life. But in both of these works, Eliot limits her examination of the way her ideal might be realized in a strictly limited sphere. Silas Marner is the best example in Eliot's work of what she calls in a letter "the remedial influences of

pure, natural human relations."[3] But Dolly and Silas live in a small unified society and each influences a single individual.

It is not nearly as easy to exert these same "remedial influences" in a wider sphere, and Eliot reveals her recognition of the complexities involved in such an attempt in Romola. Savonarola hopes to influence an entire society to change; he hopes to restore the Florentine republic and inspire the people of Florence to organize their government according to Christian principles. He is unsuccessful in part because he allows his desire for personal glory to take precedence over his desire to achieve his goals, but there is another reason for Savonarola's failure. The effect that his attempts to influence others produces is not always the effect that he intends to produce; for example, his sermons prompt Bardo to seek vengeance against Tito for having betrayed him instead of inspiring Bardo to work for reform, as was intended. Furthermore, Romola herself chooses at the end of the novel to exert a beneficial influence only on those whom she regards as her own family instead of trying to effect a similar influence on the whole society, as Savonarola had done. Only Savonarola's influence on Romola herself is lasting. In Romola, Eliot, in effect, seems to suggest that it is not possible to achieve the kind of beneficial influence on an

entire society that her feminine ideal requires since the effects produced are not always those that are intended. Romola can only affect the society as a whole by attempting to insure that Tito's son will share Savonarola's religious and political beliefs, a very limited effect indeed.

In Middlemarch, Eliot is more successful in suggesting the way in which an individual can have a beneficial effect on an entire society than she is in Romola. And she also registers her concern about the fact that a woman's opportunity to achieve influence outside the family is severely limited. While Dorothea longs to change things for the better on a broad scale, even hoping at one point to found an ideal community, she is unable to achieve what she wants to do even after she has the means with which to do what she likes. She is limited by her lack of education to using her influence on Will Ladislaw to convince him to employ his wider knowledge to work for political reform. Though Eliot indicates through her characterization of Caleb Garth that she still believes that one individual's beneficial influence on another is extremely valuable, she clearly considers the work that Will does to help bring about the passage of the reform bills to be more significant. The kind of limited influence that Will has on society is more valuable than Savonarola's attempts to effect sweeping reforms since, according to Eliot's think-

ing, Will's influence is more lasting than Savonarola's. In addition, Eliot uses the character of Bulstrode to reveal her belief that it is far easier to have a harmful effect on society than it is to have a good influence.

Finally, Daniel Deronda differs greatly from both Romola and Middlemarch since Eliot attempts in her last novel to suggest that it is possible for an individual to have a much greater political influence than the two earlier novels indicate. Deronda actually attempts to change world politics by traveling to Palestine after he learns that he is a Jew and working for the foundation of a Jewish state. But Eliot's argument that her feminine ideal can be realized on this level is not successful since she cannot explain exactly how Deronda is going to accomplish his goals, and, more importantly, because she does not convince the reader that those goals are as valuable as Deronda believes them to be. Her portrayal of Judaism as "the heart of mankind" places a larger burden on Mordecai's, and Deronda's theories than they are able to support.

However, Deronda's influence on Gwendolyn Harleth recalls the kind of beneficial influence on a single individual that Dolly Winthrop had on Silas in Silas Marner and suggests, again, that this sort of influence is more effective than any attempt to achieve sweeping political

reform could be. Moreover, the fact that Deronda must leave England in order to do the sort of work he wants to do is evidence of a growing pessimism on Eliot's part. She seems to suggest that, in England, even the kind of limited reforms that Will and Dorothea help to achieve in Middlemarch have become impossible. Nevertheless, the great success with which she depicts the changes that take place in Gwendolyn as a result of Deronda's influence on her reveals that Eliot continues to believe in her particular moral vision which I have called her feminine ideal.

Notes

[1] Robin Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 1.

[2] Gordon Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), VI, 289. Hereafter referred to as Letters.

[3] Gordon Haight, ed., Letters, III, 382.

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